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VOL. 3034.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 2.

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VOL. 3034.

PERLYCROSS. BY R. D. BLACKMORE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



PERLYCROSS

A TALE OF THE WESTERN HILLS

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE,

AUTHOR OF "ALICE LORRAINE," "CHRISTOWELL,"

ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1895.

THE CHURCH

OF THE NEW WORLD

IN THE AMERICAN

REPUBLIC

BY

JOHN W. FOSTER

IN TWO VOLUMES VOL. II

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PERLYCROSS.

CHAPTER I.

A SERMON IN STONE.

Now Sergeant Jakes was not allowed to chastise any boys on Sunday. This made the day hang very heavy on his hands; and as misfortunes never come single, the sacred day robbed him of another fine resource. For Mr. Penniloe would not permit even Muggridge, the pious, the sage, and the prim, to receive any visitors—superciliously called by the front-door people “followers”—upon that blessed day of rest, when surely the sweeter side of human nature is fostered and inspirited, from reading-desk and lectern, from gallery and from pulpit.

However even clergymen are inconsistent, as their own wives acknowledge confidentially; and Mr. Penniloe’s lectures upon Solomon’s Song—a treatise then greatly admired, as a noble allegory, by High Churchmen—were not enforced at home by any warmth of practice. Thus stood the law; and of all offences upon the Sergeant’s Hecatologue, mutiny was the most heinous; therefore he could not mutiny.

But surely if Mr. Penniloe could have received, or conceived, a germ of the faintest suspicion concerning this faithful soldier's alternatives on the afternoon of the Sabbath—as Churchmen still entitled it—he would have thrown open every door of kitchen, back-kitchen, scullery, and even pantry to him, that his foot might be kept from so offending. Ay, and more than his foot, his breast, and arm—the only arm he had, and therefore leaving no other blameless.

It is most depressing to record the lapse of such a lofty character, so gallant, faithful, self-denying, true, austere, and simple—though some of these merits may be refused him, when the truth comes out—as, alas, it must. All that can be pleaded in his favour, is that ancient, threadbare, paltry, and (as must even be acknowledged) dastardly palliation—the woman tempted him, and he fell! Fell from his brisk and jaunty mien, his noble indifference to the fair, and severity to their little ones, his power of example to the rising age, and his pure-minded loyalty to Thyatira, watered by rivers of tea, and fed by acres of bread and butter. And the worst of it was, that he had sternly resolved, with haughty sense of right and hearty scorn of a previous slip towards backsliding, that none 'of this weakness should ever, even in a vision, come anigh him any more. Yet see, how easily this rigid man was wound round the finger of a female “teener”—as the Americans beautifully express it!

He was sitting very sadly at his big black desk, one mild and melancholy Sabbath eve, with the light of the dull day fading out, and failing to make facets from the diamonds of the windows, and the heavy school-

clock ticking feebly, as if it wished time was over: while shadows, that would have frightened any other unmarried man in the parish, came in from the silent population of the old churchyard, as if it were the haze of another world. A little cloud of smoke, to serve them up with their own sauce, would have consoled the school-master; but he never allowed any smoking in this temple of the Muses, and as the light waned he lit his tallow candle, to finish the work that he had in hand.

This was a work of the highest criticism, to revise, correct, and arrange in order of literary merit all the summaries of the morning sermon prepared by the head-class in the school. Some of these compositions were of extreme obscurity, and some conveyed very strange doctrinal views. He was inclined to award the palm to the following fine epitome, practical, terse, and unimpeachably orthodox—"The Sermon was, sir, that all men ort to be good, and never to do no wikked things whenever they can help it." But while he yet paused, with long quill in hand, the heavy oak door from the inner yard was opened very gently, and a slender form attired in black appeared at the end of the long and gloomy room.

Firm of nerve as he was, the master quailed a little at this unexpected sight; and therefore it became a very sweet relief, when the vision brightened into a living and a friendly damsel, and more than that a very charming one. All firm resolutions like shadows vanished; instead of a stern and distant air and a very rigid attitude, a smile of delight and a bow of admiration betrayed the condition of his bosom.

That fair and artless Tamar knew exactly how to

place herself to the very best advantage. She stood on the further side of the candle, so that its low uncertain light hovered on the soft curve of her cheeks, and came back in a flow of steady lustre from her large brown eyes. She blushed an unbidden tear away, and timidly allowed those eyes to rest upon the man of learning. No longer was she the gay coquette, coying with frolic challenge, but the gentle, pensive, submissive maiden, appealing to a loftier mind. The Sergeant's tender heart was touched, up sprang his inborn chivalry and he swept away with his strong right hand the efforts of juvenile piety, and the lessons of Holy Writ.

"Sergeant Schoolmaster, no chair for me;" Tamar began in a humble voice, as he offered his own official seat. "I have but a moment to spare, and I fear you will be so angry with me, for intruding upon you like this. But I am so—oh so unhappy!"

"What is it, my dear? Who has dared to vex you? Tell me his name, and although it is Sunday—ah just let me come across him!"

"Nobody, nobody, Sergeant Schoolmaster;" here she pulled out a handkerchief, which a woman would have pronounced, at a glance, the property of her mistress. "Oh how shall I dare to tell you who it is?"

"I insist upon knowing," said the Sergeant boldly, taking the upper hand, because the maiden looked so humble; "I insist upon knowing who it is, this very moment."

"Then if I must tell, if you won't let me off," she answered with a sweet glance, and a sweeter smile; "it is nobody else but Sergeant Jakes himself."

"Me!" exclaimed the veteran; "whatever have I

done? You know that I would be the last in the world to vex you."

"Oh, it is because you are so fierce. And that of course is, because you are so brave."

"But my dear, my pretty dear, how could I ever be fierce to you?"

"Yes, you are going to cane my brother Billy, in the morning."

This was true beyond all cavil—deeply and beautifully true. The Sergeant stared, and frowned a little. Justice must allow no dalliance.

"And oh, he has got such chilblains, sir! Two of them broke only yesterday, and will be at their worst in the morning. And he didn't mean it, sir, oh he never meant it, when he called you an 'Old beast'!"

"The discipline of the school must be maintained." Mr. Jakes stroked his beard, which was one of the only pair then grown in the parish, (the other being Dr. Gronow's) for the growth of a beard in those days argued a radical and cantankerous spirit, unless it were that of a military man. Without his beard Mr. Jakes would not have inspired half the needful awe; and he stroked it now with dignity, though the heart beneath it was inditing of an *infra dig.* idea. "Unhappily he did it, Miss, in the presence of the other boys. It cannot be looked over."

"Oh what can I do, Sergeant? What can I do? I'll do anything you tell me, if you'll only let him off."

The Schoolmaster gave a glance at all the windows. They were well above the level of the ground outside. No one could peep in, without standing on a barrel, or getting another boy to give him a leg up.

"Tamar, do you mean what you say?" he enquired, with a glance of mingled tenderness and ferocity—the tenderness for her, the ferocity for her brother.

"If you have any doubt, you have only got to try me. There can't be any harm in that much, can there?" She looked at him, with a sly twinkle in her eyes, as much as to say—"Well now, come, don't be so bashful."

Upon that temptation, this long-tried veteran fell from his loyalty and high position. He approached to the too fascinating damsel, took her pretty hand, and whispered something through her lovely curls. Alas, the final word of his conditions of abject surrender was one which rhymed with "this," or "Miss," or—that which it should have been requited with—a hiss. Oh Muggridge, Muggridge, where were you? Just stirring a cup of unbefriended tea, and meditating on this man's integrity!

"Oh you are too bad, too bad, Sergeant!" exclaimed the young girl starting back, with both hands lifted, and a most becoming blush. "I never did—I never could have thought that you had any mind for such trifles. Why, what would all the people say, if I were only to mention it?"

"Nobody would believe you;" replied Mr. Jakes, to quench that idea, while he trembled at it; adding thereby to his iniquities.

"Well perhaps they wouldn't. No I don't believe they would. But everybody likes a bit of fun sometimes. But we won't say another word about it."

"Won't we though? I have got a new cane, Tamar—the finest I ever yet handled for spring. The rarest

thing to go round chilblains. Bargain, or no bargain, now?"

"Bargain!" she cried; "but I couldn't do it now. It must be in a more quieter place. Besides you might cheat me, and cane him after all. Oh it is too bad, too bad to think of. Perhaps I might try, next Sunday."

"But where shall I see you next Sunday, my dear? 'Never put off; it gives time for to scoff.' Give me one now, and I'll stick to it."

"No, Sergeant Jakes. I don't like to tell you, and my father would be so angry. But I don't see what right he has to put me in there. And oh, it is so lonely! And I am looking out for ghosts, and never have a happy mouthful. That old woman will have something to answer for. But it's no good to ask me, Sergeant; because—because ever so many would be after me, if they only got a hint of it."

This of course was meant to stop him; but somehow it had quite the opposite effect; and at last he got out of the innocent girl the whole tale of her Sunday seclusion. The very best handmaid—as everybody knows—will go through the longest and bitterest bout of soaking, shivering, freezing, starving, dragging under wheels, and being blown up to the sky, rather than forego her "Sunday out." Miss Tamar Haddon was entitled always to this Sabbath travail; and such was her courage that have it she would, though it blew great guns, and rained cats and dogs.

Now, her father, as may have been said before, was Walter Haddon of the *Ivy-bush*, as respectable a man as ever lived, and very fond of his children. This made him anxious for their welfare; and welfare mean-

ing even then—though not so much as now it does—fair wealth, and farewell poverty, Mr. Haddon did his best to please his wealthy aunt, a childless widow who lived at Perlycombe. For this old lady had promised to leave her money among his children, if they should fail to offend her. In that matter it was a hundredfold easier to succeed, than it was to fail; for her temper was diabolical. Poor Tamar, being of flippant tongue, had already succeeded fatally; and the first question Mrs. Pods always asked, before she got out of her pony-carriage, was worded thus—"Is that minx Tamar in the house?"

Whatever the weather might be, this lady always drove up with her lame pony to the door of the *Ivy-bush*, at half-past one of a Sunday, expecting to find a good hot dinner, and hot rum and water afterwards. For all this refreshment she never paid a penny, but presented the children with promises of the fine things they might look forward to. And thus, like too many other rich people, she kept all her capital to herself, and contrived to get posthumous interest upon it, on the faith of contingent remainders.

Now Tamar's mother was dead; and her father knowing well that all the young sparks of the village were but as the spoils of her bows and bonnets, had contrived a very clever plan for keeping her clear of that bitter Mrs. Pods, without casting her into the way of yokel youths, and spry young bachelors of low degree. At the back of his hostelry stood the old Abbey, covered with great festoons of ivy, from which the Inn probably took its name; and the only entrance to the ruins was by the arched gateway at the end of his yard, other

approaches having been walled up; and the key of the tall iron gate was kept at this Inn for the benefit of visitors.

The walls of the ancient building could scarcely be seen anywhere for the ivy; and the cloisters and roofless rooms inside were overgrown with grass and briars. But one large chamber, at the end of a passage, still retained its vaulted ceiling, and stone pavement scarred with age. Perhaps it had been the refectory, for at one side was a deep fireplace, where many a hearty log had roared; at present its chief business was to refresh Miss Tamar Haddon. A few sticks kindled in the old fireplace, and a bench from the kitchen of the Inn, made it a tolerable keeping-room, at least in the hours of daylight; though at night the bold Sergeant himself might have lacked the courage for sound slumber there.

To this place was the fair Tamar banished, for the sake of the moneybags of Mrs. Pods, from half-past one till three o'clock, on her Sunday visits to the *Ivy-bush*. Hither the fair maid brought her dinner, steaming in a basin hot, and her father's account-book of rough jottings, which it was her business to verify and interpret; for, as is the duty of each newer generation, she had attained to higher standard of ennobling scholarship.

In a few words now she gave the loving Sergeant a sketch of this time-serving policy, and her exile from the paternal dinner-table, which aroused his gallant wrath; and then she told him how she had discovered entrance unknown to her father, at a spot where a thicket of sycamores, at the back of the ruins, concealed a loop-hole not very difficult to scale. She could

make her escape by that way, if she chose, after her father had locked her in, if it were not for spoiling her Sunday frock. And if her father went on so, for the sake of pleasing that ugly old frump, she was blest if she would not try that plan, and sit on the river bank far below, as soon as the Spring dried up the rubbish. But if the Sergeant thought it worth his while, to come and afford her a little good advice, perhaps he might discover her Sunday hat waving among the ivy.

This enamoured veteran accepted tryst, with a stout heart, but frail conscience. The latter would haply have prevailed, if only the wind had the gift of carrying words which the human being does not utter, but thinks and forms internally. For the sly maid to herself said this, while she hastened to call her big brother Watty, to see her safe back to Walderscourt.

“What a poor old noodle! As if I cared twopence, how much he whacks Billy! Does he think I would ever let him come anigh me, if it wasn’t to turn him inside out? Now if it were Low Jarks, his young brother, that would be quite another pair of shoes.”

On the following Sunday it was remarked, by even the less observant boys, that their venerated Master was not wearing his usual pair of black Sunday breeches, with purple worsted stockings showing a wiry and muscular pair of legs. Strange to say, instead of those, he had his second best small-clothes on, with dark brown gaiters to the knee, and a pair of thick laced shoes, instead of Sunday pumps with silk rosettes. So wholly unversed in craft, as yet, was this good hero of a hundred fights. Thyatira also marked this change, with

some alarm and wonder; but little dreamed she in her simple faith of any rival Delilah.

Mr. Penniloe's sermon, that Sunday morning, was of a deeply moving kind. He felt that much was expected of him, after his visit to London; where he must have seen the King and Queen, and they might even have set eyes on him. He put his long-sight glasses on, so that he could see anybody that required preaching at; and although he was never a cushion-thumper, he smote home to many a too comfortable bosom. Then he gave them the soft end of the rod to suck, as a conscientious preacher always does, after smiting hip and thigh, with a weapon too indigenous. In a word, it was an admirable sermon, and one even more to be loved than admired, inasmuch as it tended to spread good-will among men, as a river that has its source in heaven.

Sergeant Jakes, with his stiff stock on, might be preached at for ever, without fetching a blink. He sat bolt upright, and every now and then flapped the stump of his left arm against his sound heart, not with any eagerness to drive the lesson home, but in proof of cordial approbation of hits, that must tell upon his dear friends round about. One cut especially was meant for Farmer John; and he was angry with that thick-skinned man, for staring at another man, as if it were for him. And then there was a passage, that was certain to come home to his own brother Robert, who began to slaughter largely, and was taking quite money enough to be of interest to the pulpit. But everybody present seemed to Jakes to be applying everything to everybody else—a disinterested process of the noblest turn of thought.

However those who have much faith—and who can

fail to have some?—in the exhortations of good men who practise their own preaching, would have been confirmed in their belief by this man's later conduct. Although the body of the church had been reopened for some weeks now, with the tower-arch finished and the south wall rebuilt, yet there were many parts still incomplete, especially the chancel where the fine stone screen was being erected as a reredos; and this still remained in the builder's hands, with a canvas partition hiding it.

When the congregation had dispersed, Mr. Jakes slipped in behind that partition, and stood by a piece of sculpture which he always had admired. In a recess of the northern wall, was a kneeling figure in pure white marble of a beautiful maiden claimed by death on the very eve of her wedding-day. She slept in the Waldron vaults below; while here the calm sweet face, portrayed in substance more durable than ours, spoke through everlasting silence of tenderness, purity, and the more exalted love.

The Sergeant stood with his hard eyes fixed upon that tranquil countenance. It had struck him more than once that Tamar's face was something like it; and he had come to see whether that were so. He found that he had been partly right, but in more important matters wrong. In profile, general outline, and the rounding of the cheeks, there was a manifest resemblance. But in the expression and quality of the faces, what a difference! Here all was pure, refined and noble, gentle, placid, spiritual. There all was tempting, flashing, tricksome, shallow, earthly, sensuous.

He did not think those evil things, for he was not

a physiognomist; but still he felt the good ones; and his mind being in the better tone—through commune with the preacher's face, which does more than the words sometimes, when all the heart is in it—the wonted look of firmness, and of defiance of the Devil, returned to his own shrewd countenance. The gables of his eyebrows, which had expanded and grown shaky, came back to their proper span and set; he nodded sternly, as if in pursuit of himself with a weapon of chastisement; and his mouth closed as hard as a wrench-hammer does, with the last turn of the screw upon it. Then he sneered at himself, and sighed as he passed the empty grave of his Colonel—what would that grand old warrior have thought of this desertion to the enemy?

But ashamed as he was of his weak surrender and treachery to his colours, his pride and plighted word compelled him to complete his enterprise. The Abbey stood near the churchyard wall, but on that side there was no entrance; and to get at the opposite face of the buildings, a roundabout way must be taken; and Jakes resolved now that he would not skulk by the lower path from the corner, but walk boldly across the meadow from the lane that led to Perlycombe. This was a back way with no house upon it, and according to every one's belief here must have lurked that horse and cart, on the night of that awful outrage.

Even to a one-handed man there was no great difficulty in entering one of the desolate courts, by the loophole from the thicket; and there he met the fair recluse in a manner rather disappointing to her. Not that she cared at all to pursue her light flirtation with him, but that her vanity was shocked, when he failed

to demand his sweet reward. And he called her "Miss Haddon," and treated her with a respect she did not appreciate. But she led him to her lonely bower, and roused up the fire for him, for the weather was becoming more severe, and she rallied him on his clemency, which had almost amounted to weakness, ever since he allowed her brother Billy to escape.

"Fair is fair, Miss;" the Master answered pensively. "As soon as you begin to let one off, you are bound to miss the rest of them."

"Who have they got to thank for that? I am afraid they will never know," she said with one of her most bewitching smiles, as she came and sat beside him. "Poor little chaps! How can I thank you for giving them such a nice time, Sergeant?"

The veteran wavered for a moment, as that comely face came nigh, and the glossy hair she had contrived to loosen fell almost on his shoulders. She had dressed herself in a killing manner, while a lover's knot of mauve-coloured ribbon relieved the dulness of her frock, and enhanced the whiteness of her slender neck. But for all that, the Sergeant was not to be killed, and his mind was prepared for the crisis. He glanced around first, not for fear of anybody, but as if he desired witnesses; and then he arose from the bench, and looked at this seductive maiden, with eyes that had a steady sparkle, hard to be discomfited by any storm of flashes.

"Tamar," he said, "let us come to the point. I have been a fool; and you know it. You are very young; but somehow you know it. Now have you meant, from first to last, that you would ever think of marrying me?"

It never should have been put like that. Why you must never say a word, nor use your eyes except for reading, nor even look in your looking-glass, if things are taken in that way.

"Oh Sergeant, how you frighten me! I suppose I am never to smile again. Who ever dreamed of marrying?"

"Well, I did;" he answered with a twinkle of his eyes, and squaring of his shoulders. "I am not too old for everybody; but I am much too old for you. Do you think I would have come here else? But it is high time to stop this fun."

"I don't call it fun at all;" said Tamar, fetching a little sob of fright. "What makes you look so cross at me?"

"I did not mean to look cross, my dear." The Sergeant's tender heart was touched. "I should be a brute, if I looked cross. It is the way the Lord has made my eyes. Perhaps they would never do for married life."

"That's the way all of them look," said Tamar; "unless they get everything they want. But you didn't look like that, last Sunday."

"No. But I ought. Now settle this. Would you ever think of marrying me?"

"No. Not on no account. You may be sure of that. Not even if you was dipped in diamonds." The spirit of the girl was up, and her true vulgarity came out.

"According to my opinion of you, that would make all the difference," said the Sergeant, also firing up. "And now, Miss Haddon, let us say 'Good-bye.'"

"Let me come to myself, dear Sergeant Jakes. I

never meant to be rude to you. But they do court me so different. Sit down for a minute. It is so lonely, and I have heard such frightful things. Father won't be coming for half an hour yet. And after the way you went on, I am so nervous. How my heart goes pit a pat! You brave men cannot understand such things."

At this moving appeal, Mr. Jakes returned, and endeavoured to allay her terrors.

"It is all about those dreadful men," she said; "I cannot sleep at night for thinking of them. You know all about them. If you could only tell me what you are doing to catch them. They say that you have found out where they went, and are going to put them in jail next week. Is it true? People do tell such stories. But you found it all out by yourself, and you know all the rights of it."

With a little more coaxing, and trembling, and gasping, she contrived to get out of him all that he knew, concerning the matter to the present time. Crang had identified the impressions as the footmarks of the disabled horse; and a search of the cave by torchlight showed that it must have been occupied lately. A large button with a raised rim, such as are used on sailors' overalls, had been found near the entrance, and inside were prints of an enormous boot, too big for any man in Perlycross. Also the search had been carried further, and the tracks of a horse and a narrow-wheeled cart could be made out here and there, until a rough flinty lane was come to, leading over the moors to the Honiton road. All these things were known to Dr. Fox, and most of them to Mr. Penniloe, who had just returned

from London, and the matter was now in skilful hands. But everything must be kept very quiet, or the chance of pursuing the clue might be lost.

Tamar vowed solemnly that she would never tell a word; and away went the Sergeant, well pleased with himself, as the bells began to ring for the afternoon service.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD MILL.

COMBING up on the South like a great tidal wave, Hagdon Hill for miles looks down on the beautiful valley of the Perle, and then at the western end breaks down into steep declivities and wooded slopes. Here the Susscot brook has its sources on the southern side of the long gaunt range, outside the parish of Perlycross; and gathering strength at every stretch from flinty trough, and mossy runnel, is big enough to trundle an old mill-wheel, a long while before it gets to Joe Crang's forge.

This mill is situated very sweetly for those who love to be outside the world. It stands at the head of a winding hollow fringed along the crest with golden gorse, wild roses by the thousand, and the silvery gleam of birch. Up this pretty "goyal"—as they call it—there is a fine view of the ancient mill, lonely, decrepit, and melancholy, with the flints dropping out of its scarred wall-face, the tattered thatch rasping against the wind, and the big wheel dribbling idly; for the wooden carrier, that used to keep it splashing and spinning merrily, sprawls away on its trestles, itself a wreck, broken-backed and bulging.

And yet in its time this mill has done well, and pounded the corn of a hundred farms; for, strange as it may be, the Perle itself is exceedingly shy of mill-work, being broken upon no wheel save those of the staring and white-washed factory which disfigures the village of Perlycross. Therefore from many miles around came cart, and butt, and van, and wain, to this out-of-the-way and hard to find, but flourishing and useful Tremlett mill. That its glory has departed and its threshold is deserted, came to pass through no fault of wheel, or water, or even wanton trade seduced by younger rivals. Man alone was to blame, and he could not—seldom incapable as he is of that—even put the fault on woman.

The Tremletts were of very ancient race, said to be of Norman origin, and this mill had been theirs for generations. Thrifty, respectable, and hard-working, they had worn out many millstones—one of which had been set up in the churchyard, an honour to itself and owner—and patched up a lot of ages of mill-wheels (the only useful revolution) until there came into the small human sluice a thread of vile weed, that clogged everything up. A vein of bad blood that tainted all, varicose, sluggish, intractable.

What man can explain such things, even to his own satisfaction? Yet everybody knows that it is so, and too often with the people who have been in front of him. Down went the Tremletts for a hundred years—quite a trifle to such an old family—and the wheel ceased to turn, and the hearth had nought to burn, and the brook took to running in a low perverted course.

But even sad things may be beautiful—like the grandest of all human tragedies,—and here before Mr. Penniloe's new long-sighted glasses, which already had a fine effect upon his mind, was a prospect, worth all the three sovereigns he had paid, in addition to the three he had lived under. No monarch of the world—let alone this little isle—could have gilded and silvered and pearled and jewelled his most sumptuous palace, and his chambers of delight, with a tithe of the beauty here set forth by nature, whose adornments come and go, at every breath.

For there had just been another heavy fall of snow, and the frost having firm hold of the air, the sun had no more power than a great white star, glistening rather than shining, and doubtful of his own domain in the multitude of sparkles. Everything that stood across the light was clad with dazzling raiment; branch, and twig, and reed, and ozier, pillowed with lace of snow above, and fringed with chenille of rime below. Under and through this arcade of radiance, stood the old mill-wheel—for now it could stand—black, and massive, and leaning on pellucid pillars of glistening ice.

Mr. Penniloe lifted up his heart to God, as he always did at any of His glorious works; and then he proceeded to his own less brilliant, but equally chilling duty. Several times he knocked vainly at the ricketty door of the remaining room, until at last a harsh voice cried—"Come in, can't 'e? Nort for 'e to steal here."

Then he pulled the leather thong, an old boot-lace, and the grimy wooden latch clicked up, and the big door staggered inwards. Everything looked cold and weist and haggard in the long low room he entered,

and hunger-stricken, though of solid fabric once, and even now tolerably free from dirt. At the further end, and in a gloomy recess, was a large low bedstead of ancient oak, carved very boldly and with finely flowing lines. Upon it lay a very aged woman, of large frame and determined face, wearing a high yellow cap, and propped by three coarse pillows, upon which fell the folds of a French shawl of rich material.

She had thick eyebrows, still as black as a coal, and fierce gray eyes with some fire in them still, and a hooked nose that almost overhung a pointed chin; and her long bony arms lay quivering upon a quilt of well-worn patchwork. She looked at Mr. Penniloe, discerning him clearly without the aid of spectacles, and saluted him with a slight disdainful nod.

"Oh, Passon is it? Well, what have 'e got to say to me?" Her voice was hard and pitched rather high, and her gaunt jaws worked with a roll of wrinkles, intended for a playful grin.

"Mrs. Tremlett, I was told that you wished to see me, and that it is a solemn moment with you—that soon you will stand in the presence of a merciful but righteous Judge."

Mr. Penniloe approached her with a kind and gentle look, and offered to take one of her clenched and withered hands, but she turned the knuckles to him with a sudden twist, and so sharp were they that they almost cut his palm. He drew back a little, and a flash of spiteful triumph told him that she had meant this rasper for him.

"Bain't a gwäin' to die yet," she said; "I be only ninety-one, and my own moother wor ninety-five afore

her lost a tooth. I reckon I shall see 'e out yet, Master Passon; for 'e don't look very brave—no that 'e don't. Wants a little drap out o' my bottle, I conzider."

The clergyman feared that there was little to be done! but he never let the Devil get the best of him, and he betook himself to one of his most trustworthy resources.

"Mrs. Tremlett, I will with your permission offer a few simple words of prayer, not only for you but for myself, my friend. You can repeat the words after me, if you feel disposed."

"Stop!" she cried, "stop!" and threw out both hands with great vigour, as he prepared to kneel. "Why, you han't gi'en me the zhillin' yet. You always gives Betty Cork a zhillin', afore 'e begins to pray to her. Bain't my soul worth every varden of what Betty Cork's be?"

The Parson was distressed at this inverted view of the value of his ministrations. Nevertheless he pulled out the shilling, which she clapped with great promptitude under her pillow, and then turned her back upon him.

"Goo on now, Passon, as long as ever 'e wull; but not too much noise like, case I might drop off to sleep."

Her attitude was not too favourable; but the Curate had met with many cases quite as bad, and he never allowed himself to be discouraged. And something perhaps in his simple words, or the powers of his patient humility, gave a better and a softer turn to the old woman's moody mind.

"Passon, be you a honest man?" she enquired, when

he had risen, affording that adjective a special roughness, according to the manner of Devon. "B'lieve 'e be a good man. But be 'e honest?"

"My goodness, as you call it, would be very small indeed, unless I were honest, Mrs. Tremlett. Without honesty, all is hypocrisy."

"And you bain't no hypocrite; though 'e may be a vule. Most fine scholars is big vules, and half-scholars always maketh start for rogues. But I'll trust 'e, Passon; and the Lord will strike 'e dead, being in his white sleeves, every Zunday, if 'e goo again the truth. What do 'e say to that, Passon Penniloe? What do 'e think now of that there? And the praying for me, as if I hadn't got ne'er a coffin's worth!"

The old lady pulled out a canvas bag, and jingled it against Mr. Penniloe's gray locks. Strong vitality was in her face. How could she die, with all that to live for?

"Vifty-two guineas of Jarge the Zecond. T'other come to the throne afore I did it; but his head wasn't out much, and they might goo back of his 'en. So I took 'un of the man as come afore, and there they has been ever since—three score years, and ten, and two. The Lord knoweth, if He reckon'th up the sparrows, what a fine young woman I were then. There bain't such a one in all the County now. Six foot high, twenty inch across the shoulders, and as straight as a hazel wand sucker'd from the root. Have mercy on you, Passon! Your wife, as used to come to see me, was a very purty woman. But in the time of my delight, I could 'a taken her with one hand, and done—well, chucked her over Horse-shoe."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Penniloe asked, and his quiet eyes bore down the boastful gaze, and altered the tone of the old virago.

"Nort, sir, nort. It bain't no use to worrit me. Her tumbled off the clift, and her bruk her purty nack. Her was spying too much after coney's holes, I reckon. But her always waz that tender-hearted. You bain't fit to hold a can'le to her, with all your precious prayers and litanies. But I'll trust 'e, Passon, for her zake. Vetch thiccy old book out o' cubbert."

In the cupboard near the fireplace he found an ancient Bible, bound in black leather, and fortified with silver clasps and corners.

"Hold that there book in your right hand, and this here bag in t'other;" the old lady still clave to the bag, as if far more precious than the Bible—"and then you say slowly after me, same as I was to do the prayers, 'I, Passon Penniloe, of Perlycross, Christian Minister, do hereby make oath and swear that I will do with this bag of money as Zipporah Tremlett telleth me, so help me God Almighty.'"

"Stop, if you please. I will make no such promise, until I know all about it;" objected Mr. Penniloe, while she glared at him with rising anger, and then nodded as something occurred to her.

"Well, then, I'll tell 'e fust; and no call for prabbles. This money bain't none o' they Tremletts; every varden of theirs is gone long ago, although they had ten times so much as this, even while I can mind of 'un. All this, except for a bit of a sto'un in the lower cornder, and that had been hunderds of years with the Tremletts, but all the rest cometh from my own father, and none

on 'em knoweth a word of it. Wouldn't believe if they did, I reckon. Zippy, that's my grand-darter as minds me, her hath orders to hurn for her life and vetch you—night or day, mind,—fust moment the breath be gone out of my body. And every varden of it is for she. You be to take it from this here little nestie, wi'out a word to no one, and keep it zealed up under lock and key, till Zippy be eighteen year of age, and then, accordin' to your oath, you putt it into her two hands. If 'e do that, Passon, I'll die a Christian, and you be welcome of me to your churchyard. But if 'e wun't do it, then I'll die a hathen, and never go to no churchyard, same as scores and scores of the Tremletts is. Now, do 'e care for the soul of an old 'ooman? Or would 'e soonder her went to the Devil?"

By this alternative the Curate felt much pressure put upon his conscience. If there were no other way to save her, he must even dispense with legal form, and accept a trust, which might for all he knew defraud the Revenue of legacy duty, and even some honest solicitor of a contribution to his livelihood. But first he must be certain that the scheme was just and rational.

"No fear of robbing nobody. They Tremletts be a shocking lot," she said, with amiable candour. "Just slip the wedge on top of latch, for fear one on 'em should come to see if I be dead; though I reckon, this weather, it would be too much for either son or darter. Wouldn't 'em hurn, if 'em knowed of this? But here I may lie and be worm-eaten. And chillers of my own—my own buys and girls. Dree quarters of a score I've had, and not one on 'em come anigh me! Never was

a harrier-bird could fly so fast as every one on 'em would, to this old bed, if 'em knowed what be in it. No, I be a liar—every one on 'em can't, because the biggest half be gone. Twelve buys there was, and dree wenches of no count. Dree buys was hanged, back in time of Jarge the Third, to Exeter jail, for ship-staling, and one to Gibbet-moor, for what 'a did upon the road. Vour on 'em was sent over seas, for running a few bits of goods from France. Two on 'em be working to Whetstone pits, 'cording to their own account, though I reckon they does another sort of job, now and again. And as for t'other two, the Lord, or the Devil, knoweth what be come to they. Not one on 'em comes nigh poor old moother, who might a' died years ago 'cep for little Zippy. Though little Zip's father have a' been here now and then. The biggest and the wildest of the dozen I call him, though a' kapeth wonderful out of jail. 'Tis his cheel he comes to see, not his poor old moother. Look 'e ere, Passon, all the ins and outs of 'un be set down rarely in that there book; same as the game with lines and crosses we used to play with a oyster-shell, fourscore years agone and more."

On three or four leaves of the ancient Bible, bound in for that purpose, was a pedigree of these Tremletts of the Mill, descending from the fourteenth century. Mr. Penniloe looked at it with no small interest. What a pity to find them come to this! The mill itself had been a fall no doubt; but the Whetstone pits were a great descent from that.

"Tremletts has always had one or two fine scholars"—the old woman had a strange theory about this.

“’Twor all along o’ that they come down so. Whenever any man taketh much to books, a’ stoppeth up his ears to good advice, and a’ heedeth of his headpiece, and robbeth of ’s own belly. But there, no matter. I can do a bit myself. Have ’e made up your mind about my poor soul?”

From the toss of her nose, Mr. Penniloe was afraid that she was not much in earnest about that little matter. And in common sense, he was loth to get entangled with the nettles and briars of such a queer lot.

“I think, Mrs. Tremlett,” he said, with a smile containing some light of wavering, “that your wisest plan by far would be to have a short will drawn up, and leave the money——”

“Gi’e me my bag, and go thy ways,” she screamed in a fury, though the bag was in her claws. “No churchyard for me, and my soul at thy door, thou white-livered, black-smocked Passon!”

Her passion struck into her lungs or throat, and she tore at her scraggy chest, to ease the pain and gripe of a violent coughing-fit. Mr. Penniloe supported her massive head, for if it fell back, it might never rise again.

“A drap out o’ bottle!” she gasped at last, pointing to the cupboard where the Bible had been. He propped up her head with a pillow on end, and took from the cupboard a long-necked bottle of the best French brandy, and a metal pannikin.

“No watter! No watter!” the old woman shrieked, as he went towards a pitcher that stood by the chimney. “Watter spileth all. No vear. Vill up!”

He gave her the pannikin full, and she tipped it off, like a mouthful of milk, and then sat up and looked at him steadily.

"I be no drunkard," she said, "though a man as knoweth nort might vancy it. Never touches that stuff, excep' for physic. I've a' seed too much what comes of that. Have a drap, wull 'e? Clane glass over yanner."

She seemed annoyed again at his refusal, but presently subsided into a milder vein, as if she were soothed by the mighty draught, instead of becoming excited.

"Naden't have troubled 'e, Passon," she said, "but for zending of little Zip away. I'll tell 'e why, now just. Better cheel never lived than little Zip. Her tendeth old grannie night and day, though her getteth a tap on the head now and then. But her mustn't know of this here money, or her father 'd have it out of her in two zeconds. Now 'e see why I won't make no will. Now, will 'e do what I axed of 'e?"

After some hesitation the Parson gave his promise. He had heard from his wife about poor little Zip, and how faithful she was to her old grandmother; and he felt that it would be unfair to the child to deprive her of the chance in life this money might procure; while he knew that if he declined the trust, not a penny would she ever see of it. He insisted however upon one precaution—that the owner should sign a memorandum of the gift, and place it with the guineas in the bag, and then hand the whole to him as trustee, completing by delivery the *donatio mortis causâ*. In spite of her sufferings from the ruinous effects of the

higher education, Zipporah could sign her name very fairly, and a leaf of her grandchild's copybook served very well for the memorial prepared by Mr. Penniloe.

"Now rouse up the fire there, 'e must be froze a'most," Mrs. Tremlett said when that was finished, and she had shown him where she concealed the treasure. "‘One good toorn desarves another,’ as I’ve heerd say, though never had much chance of proving it; and I could tell 'e a thing or two, 'e might be glad to know, Passon Penniloe, wi’out doing harm to nobody. Fust place then, you mind hearing of the man as gi’ed that doiled zany of a blacksmith such a turn—how long ago was it? I can’t say justly; but the night after Squire Waldron’s vuneral.”

"To be sure. The big man with the lame horse, at Susscot Ford.”

"Well, that man was my son Harvey, little Zip’s father. You see the name in big Bible. French name it waz then, spelled different, and with a stroke to the tail, as maight be. Tremletts had a hankering after foreign languages. See 'un all down the page you can.”

"What, Mrs. Tremlett!" exclaimed the Parson. "Are you aware what you are doing? Informing against your own son—and one of the very few remaining!"

"Zober now, zoher! Don’t 'e be a vule, Passon. I knows well enough what I be adoin’ of. Just I wants 'un out of way, till arter I be buried like. I zent his little darter to the pits to-day, to tell 'un as how you knowed of it. That’ll mak 'un cut sticks, till I be underground, I reckon.”

As the old woman grinned and nodded at her own

sagacity, a horrible idea crossed the mind of Mr. Penniloe. Could she be afraid that her own son would dig up her body, and dispose of it?

Before he had condemned himself for such a vile suspicion, Mrs. Tremlett seemed to have read his thoughts; for she smiled with bitter glory, as if she had caught a pious man yielding to impiety.

"No, Harvey bain't no body-snatcher—leastways not as I ever heer'd on; though most volk would say a' was bad enough for anything. All that I wants 'un out of way for, is that he mayn't have the chance to rob his darter. He loveth of the little maid, so much as Old Nick 'loweth him. But he could never kape his hands out of this here bag, if a' zeed 'un. And as for your folk doin' any hurt to 'un, 'twould be more use for 'e to drive nails into a shadow, than to lay hold of Harvey when he knoweth you be arter 'un. And even if 'e wor to vind 'un, man alive, it would be a bad job for you, or for zix such men as you be, to come nigh the hands of Harvey Tremlett. Volk about these parts don't know nort of un', else they'd have had un' for the 'rastling long ago. He hath been about a good deal among the Gipsies, and sailor-folk, and so on; and the Lord knows He musn't look for too very much of good in 'un."

"We must make allowances, Mrs. Tremlett. We never do justice to our fellow-men, in that way." Mr. Penniloe was saying to himself, while he spoke—"and a great deal must be allowed for such bringing-up as yours, ma'am." "But have you anything more to tell me, about that shocking thing, that is such a sad disgrace to Perlycross?" The Parson buttoned up his

Spencer, as if he still felt that dirty Pack's hits below the belt.

"I could tell 'e a saight of things, if I waz so minded, about what they vules to Perlycross, and you among t'others be mazed about. I can't make 'un out myself; but I be free to swear you'm a passel of idiots. Tremletts was bad enough; no vamley could be worse a'most; and much older they was than any Waldrons. But none on 'em never was dug up for generations. Won'erful things has come to them—things as would fill books bigger than this Bible; because 'em always wor above the lids of the ten Commandments. But 'em always had peace, so soon as they was dead, till such time as the Devil could come for 'un, and he don't care for no corpses. They Waldrons is tame—no French blood in 'em. Vitted for big pews in church, and big vunerals. Vellers not laikely to be dug up, when that waz never done to Tremletts. Passon, I could tell 'e such a saight of things, as would make the hair creep round the head of thee. Can't talk no more, or my cough will come on. Will tell 'e all about your little boy, Mike; if 'e come again when this vrost is over. And then I'll show 'e Zip. But I can't talk vair, while the houze be so cold. I've a dooded too much to-day, for a 'ooman in her ninety-zecond year. You come again about this day wake. I trust 'e now, Passon. You be a good man, because you'm got no good blood in you. A old 'ooman's blessing won't do 'e no harm."

Vast is the power of a good kind face, and of silence at the proper moment. The Curate of Perlycross possessed that large and tender nature, at which the weak

are apt to scoff, because they are not afraid of it. Over them no influence can last, for there is nothing to lay hold of. But a strong-willed person, like that old woman, has substance that can be dealt with, if handled kindly and without pretence. Thus Mr. Penniloe indulged some hope of soothing and softening that fierce and flinty nature, and guiding it towards that peace on earth, which is the surest token of the amnesty above.

But while he was at breakfast on the following day, he was told that a little maid was at the front door, crying very bitterly, and refusing to come in. He went out alone, but not a syllable would she utter, until he had closed the door behind him. There she stood, shivering in the snow, and sobbing, very poorly dressed, and with nothing on her head, but mopping her eyes and nose, as she turned away, with a handkerchief of the finest lace.

"Zip," was all the answer Mr. Penniloe could get to his gentle enquiry as to who she was; and then she looked at him with large and lustrous eyes, beautifully fringed below as well as above, and announcing very clearly that she was discussing him within. Although he guessed what her errand was, the clergyman could not help smiling at her earnest and undisguised probation of his character; and that smile settled the issue in his favour.

"You be to coom to wance;" her vowel-sounds were of the purest Devonshire air, winged by many a quill, but never summed in pen by any; "Wi'out no stapping to think, you be to coom!"

"What an imperious little Zenobia!" said Mr. Penniloe, in self-commune.

"Dunno, whatt thiccy be. Grandmoothen zayeth, 'e must coom to wance. But her be dead, zince the can'le goosed out." Her eyes burst into another flood, and she gave up the job of sopping it.

"My dear. I will come with you, in half a minute. Come and stand in the warmth, till I am ready."

"Noo. Noo. I bain't to stop. Putt on hat, and coom raight awai. Vire goosed out, and can'le goosed out, and Grannie goosed out, along wi' 'un."

Mr. Penniloe huddled his Spencer on, while the staring child danced with impatience in the snow; and quiet little Fay came and glanced at her, and wondered how such things could be. But Fay would not stare, because she was a little lady.

The clergyman was very quick of foot; but the child with her long Tremlett legs kept easily in front of him all the way, with the cloud of her black hair blowing out, on the frosty air, to hurry him.

"I bain't aveared of her. Be you?" said the little maid, as she rose on tip-toe, to pull the thong of the heavy latch. "If her coom back, her would zay—'Good cheel, Zippy!'"

CHAPTER III.

PANIC.

CHRISTMAS DAY fell on a Friday that year, and the funeral of that ancient woman took place on the previous afternoon. The Curate had never read the burial-service before so small an audience. For the weather was bitterly cold, and poor Mrs. Tremlett had outlived all her friends, if she ever had any; no one expected a

farthing from her, and no one cared to come and shudder at her grave. Of all her many descendants none, except the child Zip, was present; and she would have stood alone upon the frozen bank, unless Mrs. Muggridge had very kindly offered to come and hold the shivering and streaming little hand.

What was to be done with Zip? Nobody came forward. There were hundreds of kind people in the parish, and dozens to whom the poor waif would have been a scarcely perceptible burden. Yet nobody cared to have a Tremlett at his hearth, and everybody saw the duty marked out for his neighbour.

"Then I will take her;" said Mr. Penniloe with his true benevolence, "but the difficulty is where to place her. She cannot well be among my children yet, until I know more about her. And, although the old family is so reduced, the kitchen is scarcely the place for her." However, that question soon answered itself; and though little Zip was at first a sad puzzle (especially to the staid Muggridge), her grateful and loving nature soon began to win a warm hold and a tranquil home for her.

That winter, although it began rather early, was not of prolonged severity, for the frost broke up on Christmas night, at least in the west of England, with a heavy fall of snow which turned to rain. But Christmas Day itself was very bright and pleasant, with bracing air, hard frozen snow, and firm sunshine throwing long shadows on it, and sparkling on the icicles from thatch and spout and window-frame. As the boys of the Sunday school filed out, at the call of the bells in the tower chiming (after long silence while the arch was being cut) and as they formed into grand procession, under

the military eye of Jakes, joyfully they watched their cloudy breath ascending, or blew it in a column on some other fellow's cap. Visions were before them,—a pageantry of joy, a fortnight of holidays, a fortnight of sliding, snow balling, bone-runners, Cooper Baker's double-hoops, why not even skates?

But alas, even now the wind was backing, as the four vanes with rare unanimity proclaimed, a white fog that even a boy could stand out of was stealing up the valley, while the violet tone of the too transparent sky, and the whiteness of the sun (which used to be a dummy fireball), and even the short sharp clack of the bells, were enough to tell any boy with weather eyes and ears, that the nails on his heels would do no cobbler's click again, till the holiday time was over.

But blessed are they who have no prophetic gift, be it of the weather, or of things yet more unstable. All went to church in a happy frame of mind; and the Parson in a like mood looked upon them. Every head was there that he had any right to count, covered or uncovered. Of the latter perhaps more than a Sunday would produce; of the former not so many, but to a Christian mind enough; for how shall a great church-festival be kept without a cook? But the ladies who were there were in very choice attire, happy in having nothing but themselves to dress; all in good smiling condition, and reserving for home use their candid reviews of one another.

There was the genial and lively Mrs. Farrant, whose good word and good sayings everybody valued; close at her side was her daughter Minnie, provided by nature with seasonable gifts—lips more bright than the holly-

berry, teeth more pearly than mistletoe, cheeks that proved the hardness of the rose in Devon, and eyes that anticipated Easter-tide with the soft glance of the Forget-me-not. Then there was Mrs. John Horner, *interdum aspera cornu*, but *fœnum habens* for the roast-beef time; and kind Mrs. Anning (quite quit of this tale, though the Perle runs through her orchard), and tall Mrs. Webber with two pretty girls—all purely distinct from the lawyer—and Mrs. James Hollyer, and Mrs. John Hollyer, both great in hospitality; and others of equally worthy order, for whom the kind hearts of Bright and Cobden would have ached, had they not been blind seers.

To return to our own sheep, themselves astray, there was no denying Mrs. Gilham, looking still a Christian, up a fathom of sea-green bonnet; and her daughter Rose, now so demure if ever she caught a wandering eye, that it had to come again to beg pardon; and by her side a young man stood, with no eyes at all for the prettiest girl inside the sacred building!

But strange as it may seem, he had eyes enough and to spare, for a young man opposite; whose face he perused with perpetual enquiry, which the other understood, but did not want to apprehend. For instance, "How is your very darling sister? Have you heard from her by the latest post? Did she say anything about me? When is she coming to Perlycross again? Do you think she is reading the same Psalm that we are? Have they got any Christmas parties on? I hope there is no mistletoe up that way, or at any rate no hateful fellow near her with it?"

These, and fifty other points of private worship, not

to be discovered in the Book of Common Prayer—even by the cleverest anagram of Ritualist—did Frank Gilham vainly strive to moot with Jemmy Fox across the aisle, instead of being absorbed and rapt in the joyful tidings of the day.

Neither was Jemmy Fox a ha'porth more devout. With the innate selfishness of all young men, he had quite another dish of fish to fry for his own plate. As for Frank Gilham's, he would upset it joyfully, in spite of all sympathy or gratitude. And, if so low a metaphor can ever be forgiven, Jemmy's fish, though not in sight but in a brambly corner, was fairly hooked and might be felt; whereas Frank Gilham's, if she had ever seen his fly, had (so far as he could be sure) never even opened mouth to take it; but had sailed away upstream, leaving a long furrow, as if—like the celebrated trout in Crocker's Hole—she scorned any tackle a poor farmer could afford.

Fox, on the other hand, had reasonable hopes, that patience and discretion and the flowing stream of time, would bring his lovely prize to bank at last. For the chief thing still against him was that black and wicked charge: and even now he looked at all the women in the church, with very little interest in their features, but keen enquiry as to their expression. His eyes put the question to them, one after another,—“My good madam, are you still afraid of me?” And sad to say, the answer from too many of them was—“Well, I had rather not shake hands with you, till you have cleared your reputation.” So certain is it that if once a woman has believed a thing—be it good, or be it evil—nothing

but the evidence of her own eyes will uproot that belief; and sometimes not even that.

Especially now with Lady Waldron, Fox felt certain that his case stood thus; that in spite of all the arguments of Christie and of Inez, he was not yet acquitted, though less stubbornly condemned; and as long as that state of things lasted, he could not (with proper self-respect) press his suit upon the daughter. For it should be observed that he had no doubt yet of the genuine strength of her ladyship's suspicions. Mr. Penniloe had not thought it right or decent, placed as he was towards the family, to impart to young Jemmy Sir Harrison Gowler's hateful (because misogynic) conclusions.

That excellent preacher, and noble exemplar, the Reverend Philip Penniloe, gave out his text in a fine sonorous voice, echoing through the great pillars of his heart, three words—as many as can ever rouse an echo—and all of them short,—“On earth, peace.”

He was gazing on his flock with large good will, and that desire to see the best side of them which is creditable to both parties; for take them altogether they were a peaceful flock—when a crack, as of thunder and lightning all in one, rang in every ear, and made a stop in every heart. Before anybody could start up to ask about it, a cavernous rumble rolled into a quick rattle; and then deep silence followed.

Nervous folk started up, slower persons stared about, even the coolest and most self-possessed doubted their arrangements for the Day of Judgment. The sunlight was shining through the south aisle windows, and none could put the blame on any storm outside.

Then panic arose, as at a trumpet-call. People

huddled anyhow, to rush out of their pews, without even sense enough to turn the button-latch. Bald heads were plunging into long-ribboned bonnets, fathers forgot their children, young men their sweethearts, but mothers pushed their little ones before them. "Fly for dear life"—was the impulse of the men; "save the life dearer than my own"—was of the women. That is the moment to be sure what love is.

"Sit still boys, or I'll skin you"—Sergeant Jakes' voice was heard above the uproar; many believed that the roof was falling in; every kind of shriek and scream abounded.

"My friends," said Mr. Penniloe, in a loud clear voice, and lifting up his Bible calmly, "remember in Whose house, and in Whose hands we are. It is but a fall of something in the chancel. It cannot hurt you. Perhaps some brave man will go behind the screen, and just tell us what has happened. I would go myself, if I could leave the pulpit."

People were ashamed, when they saw little Fay run from her seat to the newly-finished steps, and begin groping at the canvas, while she smiled up at her father. In a moment three men drew her back and passed in. They were Jemmy Fox, Frank Gilham, and the gallant Jakes; and a cloud of dust floated out as they vanished. Courage returned and the rush and crush was stayed, while Horner and Farrant, the two churchwardens, came with long strides to join the explorers.

Deep silence reigned when Doctor Fox returned, and at the request of Farmer John, addressed the Parson so that all could hear. "There is no danger, sir, of any further fall. There has been a sort of settle-

ment of the south-east corner. The stone screen is cracked, and one end of it has dropped, and the small lancet window has tumbled in. All is now quite firm again. There is not the smallest cause for fear."

"Thank God!" said Mr. Penniloe, "and thank you my friends, for telling us. And now, as soon as order is quite restored, I shall beg to return to the discussion of my text, which with your permission I will read again."

As soon as he had finished a very brief discourse, worthy of more attention than it could well secure, his flock hurried gladly away, with much praise of his courage and presence of mind, but no thought of the heavy loss and sad blow cast upon him. Fox alone remained behind, to offer aid and sympathy, when the Parson laid his gown aside and came to learn the worst of it. They found that the south-east corner of the chancel-wall, with the external quoin and two buttresses, had parted from the rest, and sunk bodily to the depth of a yard or more, bearing away a small southern window, a portion of the roof and several panels of that equally beautiful and unlucky screen.

At a rough guess, at least another hundred pounds would be required to make good the damage. It was not only this, but the sense of mishaps so frequent and unaccountable—few of which have been even mentioned here—that now began to cast heavy weight and shadow, upon the cheerful heart of Penniloe. For it seemed as if all things combined against him, both as regarded the work itself, and the means by which alone it could be carried on. And this last disaster was the more depressing, because no cause whatever could be found

for it. That wall had not been meddled with in any way externally, because it seemed quite substantial. And even inside there had been but little done to it, simply a shallow excavation made, for the plinth, or footings, of the newly erected screen.

"Never mind, sir," said Fox; "it can soon be put to rights; and your beautiful screen will look ever so much better without that lancet window, which has always appeared to me quite out of place."

"Perhaps," replied the Parson, in a sad low voice, and with a shake of his head which meant—"all very fine; but how on earth am I to get the money?"

Even now the disaster was not complete. Subscriptions had grown slack, and some had even been withdrawn, on the niggardly plea that no church was worth preserving, which could not protect even its own dead. And now the news of this occurrence made that matter worse again, for the blame of course fell upon Penniloe. "What use to help a man, who cannot help himself?" "A fellow shouldn't meddle with bricks and mortar, unless he was brought up to them." "I like him too well, to give him another penny. If I did he'd pull the tower down upon his own head." Thus and thus spoke they who should have flown to the rescue; some even friendly enough to deal the coward's blow at the unfortunate.

Moreover, that very night the frost broke up, with a fall of ten inches of watery snow, on the wet back of which came more than half an inch of rain, the total fall being two inches and three quarters. The ground was too hard to suck any of it in; water by the acre lay on streaky fields of ground-ice; every gateway poured

its runnel, and every flinty lane its torrent. The Perle became a roaring flood, half a mile wide in the marshes; and the Susscot brook dashed away the old mill-wheel, and whirled some of it down as far as Joe Crang's anvil, fulfilling thereby an old prophecy. Nobody could get—without swimming horse or self—from Perlycombe to Perlycross, or from Perlycross to Perliton; and old mother Pods was drowned in her own cottage. The view of the valley, from either Beacon Hill or Hagdon, was really grand for any one tall enough to wade so far up the weltering ways. Old Channing vowed that he had never seen such a flood, and feared that the big bridge would be washed away; but now was seen the value of the many wide arches, which had puzzled Christie Fox in the distance. Alas for the Hopper, that he was so far away at this noble time for a cross-country run! But he told Pike afterwards, and Mrs. Muggridge too, that he had a good time of it, even in the Mendips.

In this state of things, the condition of the chancel, with the shattered roof yawning to the reek of the snow-slides, and a Southern gale hurling floods in at the wall-gaps, may better be imagined than described, as a swimming rat perhaps reported to his sodden family. And people had a fine view of it at the Sunday service, for the canvas curtain had failed to resist the swag and the bellying of the blast, and had fallen in a squashy pile, and formed a rough breakwater for the mortary lake behind it.

There was nothing to be done for the present except to provide against further mischief. The masons from Exeter had left work, by reason of the frost, some

time ago; but under the directions of Mr. Richard Horner the quoin was shored up, and the roof and window made waterproof with tarpaulins. So it must remain till Easter now; when the time of year, and possibly a better tide of money, might enable beaten Christians to put shoulder to the hod again. Meanwhile was there any chance of finding any right for the wrong, which put every man who looked forward to his grave out of all conceit with Perlycross?

“Vaither, do ’e care to plaze your luvving darter, as ’e used to doo? Or be ’e channged, and not the zame to her?”

“The vurry za-am. The vurry za-am,” Mr. Penniloe answered, with his eyes glad to rest on her, yet compelled by his conscience to correct her vowel sounds. It had long been understood between them, that Fay might forsake upon occasion what we now call ‘higher culture,’ and try her lissome tongue at the soft Ionic sounds, which those who know nothing of the West call *Doric*.

“Then vaither,” cried the child, rising to the situation; “whatt vor do ’e putt both han’s avore the eyes of ’e? The Lard in heaven can zee ’e, arl the zaam.”

The little girl was kneeling with both elbows on a chair, and her chin set up stedfastly between her dimpled hands, while her clear eyes, gleaming with the tears she was repressing, dwelt upon her father’s down-cast face.

“My darling, my own darling, you are the image of your mother,” Mr. Penniloe exclaimed, as he rose, and caught her up. “What is the mammon of this world to heaven’s angels?”

After that his proper course would have been to smoke a pipe, if that form of thank-offering had been duly recommended by the rising school of Churchmen. His omission however was soon repaired; for, before he could even relapse towards "the blues," the voice of a genuine smoker was heard, and the step of a man of substance, the time being now the afternoon of Monday.

"Halloa, Penniloe!" this gentleman exclaimed; "How are you, this frightful weather? Very glad to see you. Made a virtue of necessity; can't have the hounds out, and so look up my flock. Never saw the waters out so much in all my life. *Nancy* had to swim at Susscot ford. Thought we should have been washed down, but Crang threw us a rope. Says nobody could cross yesterday. *Nancy* must have a hot wash, please, Mrs. Mugg-ridge. I'll come and see to it, if you'll have the water hot. Harry's looking after her till I come back. Like to see a boy that takes kindly to a horse. What a job I had to get your back-gate open! Never use your stable-yard, it seems. Beats me, how any man can live without a horse! Well, my dear fellow, I hope the world only deals with you, according to your merits. Bless my heart, why, that can never be Fay! What a little beauty! Got a kiss to spare, my dear? Don't be afraid of me. Children always love me. Got one little girl just your height. Won't I make her jealous, when I get home? Got something in my vady, that will make your pretty eyes flash. Come, come, Penniloe, this won't do. You don't look at all the thing. Want a thirty mile ride, and a drop of brown mahogany—put a little colour into your learned face. Just you should have a look at my son, Jack. Mean him for this little

puss, if ever he grows good enough. Not a bad fellow though. And how's your little Mike? Why there he is, peeping round the corner! I'll have it out with him, when I've had some dinner. Done yours, I daresay? Anything will do for me. A rasher of bacon, and a couple of poached eggs is a dinner for a lord, I say. You don't eat enough, that's quite certain. Saw an awful thing in the papers last week. Parsons are going to introduce fasting! Protestant parsons, mind you! Can't believe it. Shall have to join the Church of Rome, if they do. All jolly fellows there—never saw a lean one. I suppose I am about the last man you expected to turn up. Glad to see you though, upon my soul! You don't like that expression—ha, how well I know your face! Strictly clerical I call it though; or at any rate, professional. But bless my heart alive—if you like that better—what has all our parish been about? Why a dead man belongs to the parson, not the doctor. The doctors have done for him, and they ought to have done with him. But we parsons never back one another up. Not enough colour in the cloth, I always say. Getting too much of black, and all black.”

The Rev. John Chevithorne, Rector of the parish, was doing his best at the present moment to relieve “the cloth” of that imputation. For his coat was dark green, and his waistcoat of red shawl-stuff, and his breeches of buff corduroy, while his boots—heavy jack-boots coming half-way up the thigh—might have been of any colour under the sun, without the sun knowing what the colour was, so spattered, and plastered, and cobbled with mud were they. And throughout all his

talk, he renewed the hand-shakes, in true pump-handle fashion, at short intervals, for he was strongly attached to his Curate. They had been at the same College, and on the same staircase; and although of different standing and very different characters, had taken to one another with a liking which had increased as years went on. Mr. Penniloe had an Englishman's love of field-sports; and though he had repressed it from devotion to his calling, he was too good a Christian to condemn those who did otherwise.

"Chevithorne, I have wanted you most sadly," he said, as soon as his guest was reclad from his vady, and had done ample justice to rashers and eggs; "I am really ashamed of it, but fear greatly that I shall have to be down upon you again. Children, you may go, and get a good run before dark. Things have been going on—in fact the Lord has not seemed to prosper this work at all."

"If you are going to pour forth a cloud of sorrows, you won't mind my blowing one of comfort."

The Rector was a pleasant man to look at, and a pleasant one to deal with, if he liked his customer. But a much sharper man of the world than his Curate; prompt, resolute, and penetrating, short in his manner, and when at all excited, apt to indulge himself in the language of the laity.

"Well," he said, after listening to the whole Church history, "I am not a rich man, as you know, my friend. People suppose that a man with three livings must be rolling in money, and all that. They never think twice of the outgoings. And Jack goes to Oxford in January.

That means something, as you and I know well. Though he has promised me not to hunt there; and he is a boy who never goes back from his word. But Chancel of course is my special business. Will you let me off for fifty, at any rate for the present? And don't worry yourself about the debt. We'll make it all right among us. Our hunt will come down with another fifty, if I put it before them to the proper tune, when they come back to work, after this infernal muck. Only you mustn't look like this. The world gets worse and worse, every day, and can't spare the best man it contains. You should have seen the rick of hay I bought last week, just because I didn't push my knuckles into it. Thought I could trust my brother Tom's churchwarden. And Tom laughs at me; which digs it in too hard. Had a rise out of him last summer though, and know how to do him again for Easter-offerings. Tom is too sharp for a man who has got no family. Won't come down with twopence for Jack's time at Oxford. And he has got all the Chevithorne estates, you know. Nothing but the copyhold came to me. Always the way of the acres, with a man who could put a child to stand on every one of them. However, you never hear me complain. But surely you ought to get more out of those Waldrons. An offering to the Lord *in memoriam*—a proper view of chastisement; have you tried to work it up?"

"I have not been able to take that view of it," Mr. Penniloe answered, smiling for a moment, though doubtful of the right to do so. "How can I ask them for another farthing, after what has happened? And leaving that aside, I am now in a position in which it would be unbecoming. You may have heard that I am

Trustee for a part of the Waldron estates, to secure a certain sum for the daughter, Nicie."

"Then that puts it out of the question," said the Rector; "I know what those trust-plagues are. I call them a tax upon good repute. 'The friendly balm that breaks the head.' I never understood that passage, till in a fool's moment I accepted a Trusteeship. However, go on with that Waldron affair. They are beginning to chaff me about it shamefully, now that their anger and fright are gone by. Poor as I am, I would give a hundred pounds, for the sake of the parish, to have it all cleared up. But the longer it goes on, the darker it gets. You used to be famous for concise abstracts. Do you remember our Thucydides? Wasn't it old Short that used to put a year of the war on an oyster-shell, and you beat him by putting it on a thumb-nail? Give us in ten lines all the theories of the great Perlycrucian mystery. Ready in a moment. I'll jot them down. What's the Greek for Perlycross? Puzzle even you, I think, that would. Number them, one, two, and so on. There must be a dozen by this time."

Mr. Penniloe felt some annoyance at this too jocular view of the subject; but he bore in mind that his Rector was not so sadly bound up with it, as his own life was. So he set down, as offering the shortest form, the names of those who had been charged with the crime, either by the public voice, or by private whisper.

1. Fox.

2. Gronow.

3. Gowler.

4. Some other medical man of those parts—conjecture founded very often upon the last half-year's account.

5. Lady Waldron herself.

6. Some relative of hers, with or without her knowledge.

"Now I think that exhausts them," the Curate continued, "and I will discuss them in that order. No. 1 is the general opinion still. I mean that of the great majority, outside the parish, and throughout the country. None who knew Jemmy could conceive it, and those who know nothing of him will dismiss it, I suppose, when they hear of his long attachment to Miss Waldron.

"Nos. 2, 3, and 4, may also be dismissed, being founded in each case on personal dislikes, without a *scintilla* of evidence to back it. As regards probability, No. 4 would take the lead; for Gronow, and Gowler, are out of the question. The former has given up practice, and hates it, except for the benefit of his friends. And as for Gowler, he could have no earthly motive. He understood the case as well as if he had seen it; and his whole time is occupied with his vast London practice. But No. 4 also is reduced to the very verge of impossibility. There is no one at Exeter, who would dream of such things. No country practitioner would dare it, even if the spirit of research could move him. And as for Bath, and Bristol, I have received a letter from Gowler disposing of all possibility there."

"Who suggested No. 5? That seems a strange idea. What on earth should Lady Waldron do it for?"

"Gowler suggested it. I tell you in the strictest confidence, Chevithorne. Of course you will feel that. I have told no one else, and I should not have told

you, except that I want your advice about it. You have travelled in Spain. You know much of Spanish people. I reject the theory altogether; though Gowler is most positive, and laughs at my objections. You remember him, of course?"

"I should think so," said the Rector, "a wonderfully clever fellow, but never much liked. Nobody could ever get on with him, but you; and two more totally different men—however, an opinion of his is worth something. What motive could he discover for it?"

"Religious feelings. Narrow, if you like—for we are as Catholic as they are—but very strong, as one could well conceive, if only they suited the character. The idea would be, that the wife, unable to set aside the husband's wishes openly, or unwilling to incur the odium of it, was secretly resolved upon his burial elsewhere, and with the rites which she considered needful."

"It is a most probable explanation. I wonder that it never occurred to you. Gowler has hit the mark. What a clever fellow! And see how it exculpates the parish! I shall go back, with a great weight off my mind. Upon my soul, Penniloe, I am astonished that you had to go to London, to find out this *a, b, c*. If I had been over here a little more often, I should have hit upon it, long ago."

"Chevithorne, I think that very likely," the Curate replied, with the mildness of those who let others be rushed off their legs by themselves. "The theory is plausible,—accounts for everything,—fits in with the very last discoveries, proves this parish, and even the English nation, guiltless. Nevertheless, it is utterly wrong; according at least to my view of human nature."

"Your view of human nature was always too benevolent. That was why everybody liked you so. But, my dear fellow, you have lived long enough now, to know that it only does for Christmas-day sermons."

"I have not lived long enough, and hope to do so never," Mr. Penniloe answered very quietly; but with a manner, which the other understood, of the larger sight looking over hat-crowns. "Will you tell me, Chevithorne, upon what points you rely? And then, I will tell you what I think of them."

"Why, if it comes to argument, what chance have I against you? You can put things, and I can't. But I can sell a horse, and you can buy it—fine self-sacrifice on your side. I go strictly upon common sense. I have heard a lot of that Lady Waldron. I have had some experience of Spanish ladies. Good and bad, no doubt, just as English ladies are. It is perfectly obvious to my mind, that Lady Waldron has done all this."

"To my mind," replied Mr. Penniloe, looking steadfastly at the Rector, "it is equally obvious that she has not."

"Upon what do you go?" asked the Rector, rather warmly, for he prided himself on his knowledge of mankind, though admitting very handsomely his ignorance of books.

"I go upon my faith in womankind." The Curate spoke softly, as if such a thing were new, and truly it was not at all in fashion then. "This woman loved her husband. Her grief was deep and genuine. His wishes were sacred to her. She is quite incapable of double-dealing. And indeed, I would say, that if ever there was a straightforward simple-hearted woman——"

"If ever, if ever," replied Mr. Chevithorne, with a fine indulgent smile. "But upon the whole, I think well of them. Let us have a game of draughts, my dear fellow, where the Queens jump over all the poor men."

"Kings, we call them here," answered Mr. Penniloe.

CHAPTER IV.

VAGABONDS.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Penniloe's anxiety about the growth of Church-debt was thus relieved a little, another of his troubles was by no means lightened through the visit of the Rector. That nasty suspicion, suggested by Gowler, and heartily confirmed by Chevithorne, was a very great discomfort, and even a torment, inasmuch as he had no one to argue it with. He reasoned with himself that even if the lady were a schemer, so heartless as to ruin a young man (who had done her no harm) that she might screen herself, as well as an actress so heaven-gifted as to impose on every one—both of which qualifications he warmly denied—yet there was no motive, so far as he could see, strong enough to lead her into such a crooked course. To the best of his belief, she was far too indifferent upon religious questions; he had never seen, or heard, of a priest at Walderscourt; and although she never came to church with the others of the family, she had allowed her only daughter to be brought up as a Protestant. She certainly did not value our great nation, quite as much as it values itself, and in fact was rather an ardent Spaniard, though herself of mixed race. But it

seemed most unlikely, that either religion or patriotism, or both combined, were strong enough to drive her into action contrary to her dead husband's wishes and to her own character, so far as an unprejudiced man could judge it.

There remained the last theory, No. 6, as given above. To the Curate it seemed the more probable one, although surrounded with difficulties. There might be some Spanish relative, or even one of other country, resolute to save the soul of Sir Thomas Waldron, without equal respect for his body; and in that case it was just possible, that the whole thing might have been arranged, and done, without Lady Waldron's knowledge. But if that were so, what meant the visit of the foreigner, who had tried to escape his notice, when he left the coach?

Before Mr. Penniloe could think it out—Jemmy Fox (who might have helped him, by way of Nicie, upon that last point) was called away suddenly from Perlycross. His mother was obliged, in the course of nature, to look upon him now as everybody's prop and comfort; because her husband could not be regarded in that light any longer. And two or three things were coming to pass, of family import and issue, which could not go aright, except through Jemmy's fingers. And of these things the most important was concerning his sister Christina.

"I assure you, Jemmy, that her state of mind is most unsatisfactory," the lady said to her son, upon their very first consultation. "She does not care for any of her usual occupations. She takes no interest in parish matters. She let that wicked old Margery Daw

get no less than three pairs of blankets, and Polly Church go without any at all—at least she might, so far as Christie cared. Then you know that admirable Huggins' Charity—a loaf and three halfpence for every cottage containing more than nine little ones;—well, she let them pass the children from one house to another; and neither loaves nor halfpence held out at all! 'I'll make it good,' she said, 'what's the odds?' or something almost as vulgar. How thankful I was, that Sir Henry did not hear her! 'Oh I wish he had, rayther,' she exclaimed with a toss of her head. You know that extremely low slangish way of saying *rayther* to everything. It does irritate me so, and she knows it. One would think that instead of desiring to please as excellent a man as ever lived, her one object was to annoy and disgust him. And she does not even confine herself to—to the language of good society. She has come back from Perlycross, with a sad quantity of Devonshirisms; and she always brings them out before Sir Henry, who is, as you know, a fastidious man, without any love of jocularities. And it is such a very desirable thing. I did hope it would have been all settled, before your dear father's birthday."

"Well, mother, and so it may easily be. The only point is this—after all her bad behaviour, will Sir Henry come to the scratch?"

"My dear son! My dear Jemmy, what an expression! And with reference to wedded life! But if I understand your meaning, he is only waiting my permission to propose; and I am only waiting for a favourable time. The sweetest tempered girl I ever saw; better even than yours, Jemmy, and yours has always

been very fine. But now—and she has found out, or made up, some wretched low song, and she sings it down the stairs, or even comes singing it into the room, pretending that she does not see me. All about the miseries of stepmothers. Oh, she is most worrying and aggravating! And to me, who have laboured so hard for her good! Sometimes I fancy that she must have seen somebody. Surely, it never could have been at Perlycross?”

“I’ll put a stop to all that pretty smartly”—the doctor exclaimed, with fine confidence. “But—but perhaps it would be better, mother, for me not to seem to take Sir Henry’s part too strongly. At any rate until things come to a climax. He is coming this afternoon, you said; let him pop the question at once; and if she dares to refuse him, then let me have a turn at her. She has got a rare tongue; but I think I know something—at any rate, you know that I don’t stand much nonsense.”

They had scarcely settled their arrangements for her, when down the stairs came Christie, looking wonderfully pretty; but her song was not of equal beauty.

“There was an old dog, and his name was ‘Shep;’
Says he to his daughter—don’t you ever be a Step.”

She nodded to her mother very dutifully, and to her brother with a smile that made him laugh; and then she went out of the front-door, almost as if she felt contempt for it.

“Won’t do. Won’t do at all;” said Jemmy. “She’ll say ‘no,’ this afternoon. Girls never know what they are about. But better let him bring it to the point.

And then leave it to me, mother. I understand her. And she knows I am not to be trifled with."

Sir Henry Haggerstone came in time for luncheon, showed no signs of nervousness, and got on very well with everybody. He knew something of everything that is likely to be talked of anywhere; and yet he had the knack of letting down his knowledge, as a carpet for his friends to walk upon. Everybody thought—"Well, I have taught him something. He could not be expected to understand that subject. But now, from his own words, I feel that he will. What a fool Smith is, to be bothering a man like Sir Henry with the stuff that is *a. b. c.* to him! I wonder that he could put up with it."

But however great Sir Henry was in powers of conversation, or even of auscultation, his eloquence—if there was any—fell flat, and his audience was brief, and the answer unmistakable.

"It can't be. It mustn't be. It shan't be, at any price." That last expression was a bit of slang, but it happened to fit the circumstances.

"But why can it not be? Surely, Miss Fox, I may ask you to give me some reason for that."

The gentleman thought—"What a strange girl you are!" While the lady was thinking—"What a difference there is between an artificial man and a natural one!"

"What o'clock is it, by that time-piece, if you please, Sir Henry Haggerstone?"

"Half-past two, within about two minutes."

"Thank you; can you tell me why it isn't half-past ten? Just because it isn't. And so now you understand."

"I am sorry to say, that I do not very clearly. Probably it is very stupid of me. But can you not give me a little hope, Miss Fox?"

"Yes, a great deal; and with my best wishes. There are thousands of nice girls, a thousand times nicer than I ever was, who would say 'yes,' in a minute."

"But the only one, whose 'yes' I want, says 'no,' in less than half a minute!"

"To be sure, she does—and means it all over; but begs to offer no end of thanks."

"Perhaps it is all for the best," he thought as he rode homeward slowly; "she is a very sweet girl; but of late she seems to have grown so fond of slang expressions—all very well for a man, but not at all what I like in a woman. I should have been compelled to break her of that trick; and even the sweetest tempered woman hates to be corrected."

This gentleman would have been surprised to hear that the phrases he disliked were used, because he so thoroughly disliked them. Which, to say the least, was unamiable.

"All settled? Hurrah! My dear Chris, let me congratulate you," cried Jemmy rushing in with a jaunty air, though he well knew what the truth was.

"Amen! It is a happy thing. That golden parallelogram, all tapered and well-rounded, will come to harass me no more."

"What a mixture of quotations! A girl alone could achieve it. A tapered parallelogram! But you have never been fool enough to refuse him?"

"I have been wise enough to do so."

"And soon you will be wise enough to think better

of it. I shall take good care to let him know, that no notice is to be taken of your pretty little vagaries."

"Don't lose your temper, my dear Jemmy. As for taking notice of it, Sir Henry may be nothing very wonderful. But at any rate he is a gentleman."

"I am heartily glad that you have found that out. I thought nobody could be a gentleman, unless he lived in a farm-house, and could do a day's ploughing, and shear his own sheep."

"Yes, oh yes! If he can roll his own pills, and mix his own black draughts, and stick a knife into any one."

"Now, it is no use trying to insult me, my dear girl. My profession is above all that."

"What, above its own business? Oh Jemmy, Jemmy! And yet you know, you were afraid sometimes of leaving it all to that little boy George. However George did the best part of it."

"Christie, I shall be off, because you don't know what you are talking of. I am sorry for any man who gets you."

"Ha! That depends upon whether I like him. If I do, wouldn't I polish his boots? If I don't, wouldn't I have the hair off his head?"

"Good-bye, my dear child. You will be better, by and by."

"Stop," exclaimed Christie, who perceived that dear Jemmy preferred to have it out with her, when she might be less ready; "don't be in such a hurry. There is no child with the measles, which is about the worst human complaint that you can cure. Just answer me one question. Have I ever interfered, between you and Nicie Waldron?"

"The Lord look down upon me! What an idea! As if you could ever be so absurd!"

"The Lord looks down upon me, also, Jemmy;" said Christie, passing into a different mood. "And He gives me the right to see to my own happiness, without consulting you; any more than you do me."

The Doctor made off, without another word; for he was not a quarrelsome fellow; especially when he felt that he would get the worst of it.

"Let her alone a bit;" he told his mother. "She has been so much used to have her own way, that she expects to have it always. It will require a little judgment, and careful handling, to bring her out of her absurdities. You must not expect her to have the sense a man has. And she has got an idea that she is so clever; which makes her confoundedly obstinate. If you had heard how insolent she was to me, you would have been angry with her. But she cannot vex me with her childish little talk. I shall go for a thirty mile ride, dear mother, to get a little fresh air after all that. Don't expect me back to dinner. Be distant with her, and let her see that you are grieved; but give her no chance of arguing—if indeed she calls such stuff argument."

In a few minutes he was on the back of *Perle*—as he called the kindly and free-going little mare, who had brought him again from Perlycross—and trotting briskly towards the long curve of highlands, which form the western bulwark of the Mendip Hills. The weather had been very mild and rather stormy, ever since the Christmas frost broke up, and now in the first week of the year, the air was quite gentle and pleasant. But the

roads were heavy and very soft, as they always are in thaw; and a great deal of water was out in the meadows, and even in the ditches alongside of the lanes.

In a puzzle of country roads and commons, further from home than his usual track, and very poorly furnished with guide-posts, Fox rode on without asking whither; caring only for the exercise and air, and absorbed in thought about the present state of things, both at Perlycross and Foxden. To his quick perception and medical knowledge it was clear that his father's strength was failing, gradually, but without recall. And one of the very few things that can be done by medical knowledge is that it can tell us (when it likes) that it is helpless.

Now Jemmy was fond of his father, although there had been many breezes between them; and as nature will have it, he loved him a hundredfold, now that he was sure to lose him. Moreover the change in his own position, which must ensue upon his father's death, was entirely against his liking. What he liked was simplicity, plain living and plain speaking, with enough of this world's goods to help a friend in trouble, or a poor man in distress; but not enough to put one in a fright about the responsibility, that turns the gold to lead. But now, if he should be compelled to take his father's place at Foxden, as a landowner and a wealthy man, he must give up the practice of his beloved art, he must give up the active and changeful life, the free and easy manners, and the game with Bill and Dick; and assume the slow dignity and stiff importance, the consciousness of being an example and a law, and all the other briars and blackthorns in the paradise of

wealth and station. Yet even while he sighed at the coming transformation, it never occurred to him that his sister was endowed with tastes no less simple than his own, and was not compelled by duty to forego them.

Occupied thus, and riding loose-reined without knowing or caring whither, he turned the corner of a high-banked lane, and came upon a sight which astonished him. The deep lane ended with a hunting-gate, leading to an open track across a level pasture, upon which the low sun cast long shadows of the rider's hat, and shoulders, and elbow lifted to unhasp the gate. Turning in the saddle he beheld a grand and fiery sunset, such as in mild weather often closes a winter but not wintry day.

A long cloud-bank, straight and level at the base, but arched and pulpy in its upper part, embosomed and turned into a deep red glow the yellow flush of the departing sun. Below this great volume of vapoury fire, were long thin streaks of carmine, pencilled very delicately on a background of limpid hyaline. It was not the beauty of the sky however, nor the splendour, nor the subtlety, that made the young man stop and gaze. Fine sunsets he had seen by the hundred, and looked at them, if there was time to spare; but what he had never seen before was the grandeur of the earth's reply.

On the opposite side of the level land, a furlong or so in front of him, arose the great breastwork to leagues of plain; first a steep pitch of shale and shingle, channelled with storm-lines, and studded with gorse; and then, from its crest, a tall crag towering, straight and smooth as a castle-wall. The rugged pediment was dark and dim, and streaked with sombre shadows; but

the bastion cliff above it mantled with a deep red glow, as if colour had its echo, in answer to the rich suffusion of that sunset cloud. Even the ivy, and other creepers, on its kindled face shone forth, like chaplets thrown upon a shield of ruddy gold. And all the environed air was thrilling with the pulses of red light.

Fox was smitten with rare delight—for he was an observant fellow—and even *Perle's* bright eyes expanded, as if they had never seen such a noble vision. "I'll be up there before it is gone," cried Jemmy, like a boy in full chase of a rainbow; "the view from that crag must be glorious."

At the foot of the hill stood a queer little hostel, called the *Smoking Limekiln*; and there he led his mare into the stable, ordered some bread and cheese for half an hour later, and made off at speed for the steep ascent. Active as he was, and sound of foot, he found it a slippery and awkward climb, on account of the sliding shingle; but after a sharp bout of leaping and scrambling he stood at the base of the vertical rock, and looked back over the lowlands.

The beauty of colour was vanishing now, and the glory of the clouds grown sombre, for the sun had sunk into a pale gray bed; but the view was vast and striking. The fairest and richest of English land, the broad expanse of the western plains for leagues and leagues rolled before him, deepening beneath the approach of night, and shining with veins of silver, where three flooded rivers wound their way. Afar towards the north, a faint gleam showed the hovering of light, above the Severn sea; whence slender clues of fog began to steal, like snakes, up the watercourses, and the marshy

inlets. Before there was time to watch them far, the veil of dusk fell over them, and things unwatched stood forth, and took a prominence unaccountable, according to the laws of twilight, arbitrary and mysterious.

Fox felt that the view had repaid his toil, and set his face to go down again, with a tendency towards bread and cheese; but his very first step caused such a slide of shingle and loose ballast, that he would have been lucky to escape with a broken bone, had he followed it. Thereupon instead of descending there, he thought it wiser to keep along the ledge at the foot of the precipice, and search for a safer track down the hill. None however presented itself, until he had turned the corner of the limestone crag, and reached its southern side, where the descent became less abrupt and stony.

Here he was stepping sideways down, for the pitch was still sharp and dangerous, and the daylight failing in the blink of hills, when he heard a loud shout—"Jemmy! Jemmy!"—which seemed to spring out of the earth at his feet. In the start of surprise he had shaped his lips for the answering halloa, when good luck more than discretion saved him; for both his feet slipped, and his breath was caught. By a quick turn he recovered balance; but the check had given him time to think, and spying a stubby cornel-bush, he came to a halt behind it, and looked through the branches cautiously.

Some twenty yards further down the hill, he saw a big man come striding forth from the bowels of the earth—as it seemed at first—and then standing with his back turned, and the haze beyond enlarging him.

And then again, that mighty shout rang up the steep and down the valley—"Jemmy, Jemmy, come back, I tell thee, or I'll let thee know what's what!"

Fox kept close, and crouched in his bush, for he never had seen such a man till now, unless it were in a caravan; and a shudder ran through him, as it came home that his friend down there could with one hand rob, throttle, and throw him down a mining shaft. This made him keep a very sharp look-out, and have one foot ready for the lightest of leg-bail.

Presently a man of moderate stature, who could have walked under the other's arm, came panting and grumbling back again from a bushy track leading downwards. He flung something on the ground and asked—

"What be up now; to vetch me back up-hill for? Harvey, there bain't no sense in 'e. Maight every bit as well a' had it out, over a half pint of beer."

"Sit you there, Jem," replied the other, pressing him down on a ledge of stone with the weight of one thumb on his shoulder. Then he sat himself down on a higher ridge, and pulled out a pipe, with a sigh as loud as the bellows of a forge could compass; and then slowly spread upon the dome of his knee a patch of German punk, and struck sparks into it.

There was just light enough for Fox to see that the place where they sat was at the mouth of a mining shaft, or sloping adit; over the rough stone crown of which, standing as he did upon a higher level, he could descry their heads and shoulders, and the big man's fingers as he moved them round his pipe. Presently a whiff of coarse brown smoke came floating uphill to the

Doctor's nostrils; and his blood ran cold, as he began to fear that this great Harvey must be the Harvey Tremlett, of whom he had heard from Mr. Penniloe.

"Made up my maind I have. Can't stand this no longer;" said the big man, with the heavy drawl, which nature has inflicted upon very heavy men. "Can't get no more for a long day's work, than a hop o' my thumb like you does."

"And good raison why, mate. Do 'e ever do a hard day's work?" Fox could have sworn that the smaller throat gave utterance to the larger share of truth. "What be the vally of big arms and legs, when a chap dothn't care to make use of 'un?"

But the big man was not controversial. Giants are generally above that weakness. He gave a long puff, and confined himself to facts.

"Got my money: and d—d little it is. And now I means to hook it. You can hang on, if you be vule enough."

"What an old Turk it is!" Jem replied reproachfully. "Did ever you know me throw you over, Harvey? Who is it brings you all the luck? Tell 'e what—let's go back to Clampits. What a bit o' luck that loudering wor!"

"Hor, hor, hor!" the big man roared. "A purty lot they be to Perlycrass! To take Jemmy Kettel for a gentleman! And a doctor too! Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Doctor Jemmy Vox Kettel! Licensed to deal in zalts and zenna, powders, pills, and bolusses. Oh Jemmy, Jemmy, my eye, my eye!"

"Could do it, I'll be bound, as well as he doth. A vaine doctor, to dig up the Squire of the parish, and

do it wrong way too, they zay of 'un! Vaine doctor, wasn't 'un? Oh Lord! Oh Lord!"

As these two rovers combined in a hearty roar of mirth at his expense, Dr. Jemmy Fox, instead of being grateful for a purely impartial opinion, gave way to ill feeling, and stamped one foot in passionate remonstrance. Too late he perceived that this movement of his had started a pebble below the cornel-bush, and sent it rolling down the steep. Away went the pebble with increasing skips, and striking the crown of the pit-mouth flew just over the heads of the uncouth jokers.

"Halloa, Jemmy! Anybody up there? Just you goo, and look, my boy."

Fox shrunk into himself, as he heard those words in a quicker roar coming up to him. If they should discover him, his only chance would be to bound down the hill, reckless of neck, and desperate of accident. But the light of the sky at the top of the hill was blocked by the rampart of rock, and so there was nothing for him to be marked upon.

"Nort but a badger, or a coney there, I reckon," Jem Kettel said, after peering up the steep; and just then a rabbit of fast style of life whisked by; "Goo on, Harvey. You han't offered me no 'bacco!"

"You tak' and vinish 'un;" said the lofty-minded giant, poking his pipe between the other fellow's teeth. "And now you give opinion; if the Lord hath gived thee any."

"Well, I be up for bunkum, every bit so much as you be. But where shall us be off to? That's the p'int of zettlement. Clampits, I say. Roaring fun there, and the gim'-keepers aveared of 'e."

"Darsn't goo there yet, I tell 'e. Last thing old moother did was to send me word, Passon to Perlycrass had got the tip on me. Don't want no bother with them blessed Beaks again."

"Wonder you didn't goo and twist the Passon's neck." The faithful mate looked up at him, as if the captain had failed of his duty, unaccountably.

"Wouldn't touch a hair of that man's head, if it wor here atwixt my two knees." Harvey Tremlett brought his fist down on his thigh, with a smack that made the stones ring round him. "Tell 'e why, Jem Kettel. He have took my little Zip along of his own chiller, and a' maneth to make a lady on her. And a lady the little wench hath a right to be—just you say the contrairy—if hanncient vam'ley, and all that, have right to count. Us Tremletts was here, long afore they Waldrons."

The smaller man appeared afraid to speak. He knew the weak point of the big man perhaps, and that silence oils all such bearings.

"Tull 'e what, Jemmy," said the other coming round, after stripping his friend's mouth of his proper pipe; "us 'll go up country—shoulder packs and be off, soon as ever the moon be up. Like to see any man stop me, I would."

He stood up, with the power of his mighty size upon him; a man who seemed fit to stop an avalanche, and able to give as much trouble about stopping him.

"All right, I be your man;" replied the other, speaking as if he were quite as big, and upon the whole more important. "Bristol fust; and then Lunnon, if so please 'e. Always a bit of louderin' there. But that remindeth

me of Perlycrass. Us be bound to be back by fair-time, you know. Can't afford to miss old Timberlegs."

"Time enow for that;" Harvey Tremlett answered. "Zix or zeven weeks yet to Perlycrass fair. What time wor it as old Timberlegs app'inted?"

"Ten o'clock at naight, by Churchyard wall. Reckon the old man hath another job of louderin' handy. What a spree that wor, and none a rap the wiser! Come along, Harvey, let's have a pint at the *Kiln*, to drink good luck to this here new start."

The big man took his hat off, while the other jumped nimbly on a stump and flung over his head the straps of both their bundles; and then with a few more leisurely and peaceful oaths they quitted their stony platform, and began to descend the winding path, from which Jem Kettel had been recalled.

Fox was content for a minute or two with peeping warily after them, while his whole frame tingled with excitement, wrath, and horror, succeeded by a burning joy at the knowledge thus vouchsafed to him, by a higher power than fortune. As soon as he felt certain that they could not see him, even if they looked back again, he slipped from his lurking-place, and at some risk of limb set off in a straighter course than theirs for the Public house in the valley, where a feeble light was twinkling. From time to time he could hear the two rovers laughing at their leisure, probably with fine enjoyment of very bad jokes at his expense. But he set his teeth, and made more speed, and keeping his distance from them, easily arrived first at the Inn, where he found his bread and cheese set forth, in a little private parlour having fair view of the Bar.

This suited him well, for his object was to obtain so clear a sight of them, that no change of dress or disguise should cast any doubt upon their identity; and he felt sure that they were wending hither to drink good speed to their enterprise. There was not much fear of their recognising him, even if his face were known to them, which he did not think at all likely. But he provided against any such mishap, by paying his bill beforehand, and placing his candle so that his face was in the dark. Then he fell to and enjoyed his bread and cheese; for the ride and the peril had produced fine relish, and a genuine Cheddar—now sighed for so vainly—did justice to its nativity. He also enjoyed, being now in safety, the sweet sense of turning the tables upon his wanton and hateful deriders.

For sure enough, while his mouth was full, and the froth on his ale was winking at him, in came those two scoffing fellows, followed by a dozen other miners. It appeared to be pay-night, and generous men were shedding sixpences on one another; but Fox saw enough to convince him that the rest fought shy of his two acquaintances.

When he saw this, a wild idea occurred to him for a moment—was it not possible to arrest that pair, with the aid of their brother miners? But a little consideration showed the folly of such a project. He had no warrant, no witness, no ally, and he was wholly unknown in that neighbourhood. And even if the miners should believe his tale, would they combine, to lay hands on brother workmen, and hand them over to the mercies of the law? Even if they would, it was doubtful that they could, sturdy fellows though they were.

But the young man was so loth to let these two vagabonds get away, that his next idea was to bribe somebody to follow them, and keep them in view until he should come in chase, armed with the needful warrant, and supported by stout *posse comitatus*. He studied the faces of his friends at the Bar, to judge whether any were fitted for the job. Alas, among all those rough and honest features, there was not a spark of craft, nor a flash of swift intelligence. If one of them were put to watch another, the first thing he would do would be to go and tell him of it.

And what Justice of the Peace would issue warrant upon a stranger's deposition of hearsays? Much against his will, Jemmy Fox perceived that there was nothing for it, but to give these two rogues a wide berth for the present, keep his own counsel most jealously, and be ready to meet them at Perlycross fair. And even so, on his long homeward ride, he thought that the prospect was brightening in the west; and that he with his name cleared might come forward, and assert his love for the gentle Nicie.

CHAPTER V.

TWO PUZZLES.

"THEN if I understand aright, Lady Waldron, you wish me to drop all further efforts for the detection of those miscreants? And that too at the very moment, when we had some reason to hope that we should at last succeed. And all the outlay, which is no trifle, will have been simply thrown away! This course is so extraordinary, that you will not think me inquisitive, if I beg you to explain it."

Mr. Webber, the lawyer, was knitting his forehead, and speaking in a tone of some annoyance, and much doubt, as to the correctness of his own reluctant inference. Meanwhile the Spanish lady was glancing at him with some dismay, and then at Mr. Penniloe, who was also present, for the morning's discussion had been of business matters.

"No, I doubt very much if you quite comprehend," she answered, with Mr. Penniloe's calm eyes fixed upon her. "I did not propose to speak entirely like that. What I was desirous of describing to you is, that to me it is less of eagerness to be going on with so much haste, until the return of my dear son. He for instance will direct things, and with his great—great command of the mind, will make the proceedings to succeed, if it should prove possible for the human mind to do it. And there is no one in this region, that can refuse him anything."

Mr. Penniloe saw that she spoke with some misgivings, and shifted her gaze from himself to the lawyer and back again, with more of enquiry, and less of dictation, than her usual tone conveyed.

"The matter is entirely one for your ladyship's own decision," replied Mr. Webber, beginning to fold up the papers he had submitted. "Mr. Penniloe has left that to us, as was correct, inasmuch as it does not concern the trust. I will stop all enquiries at once, upon receiving your instructions to that effect."

"But—but I think you do not well comprehend. Perhaps I could more clearly place it with the use of my own tongue. It is nothing more than this. I wish that my dear son should not give up his appointment

as Officer, and come back to this country, for altogether nothing. I wish that he should have the delight of thinking that—that it shall be of his own procuration, to unfold this mysterious case. Yes, that is it—that is all that I wish—to let things wait a little, until my son comes.”

If either of her listeners had been very keen, or endowed with the terrier nose of suspicion, he would have observed perhaps that the lady had found some relief from an afterthought, and was now repeating it as a happy hit. But Mr. Penniloe was too large, and Mr. Webber too rough of mind—in spite of legal training—to pry into a lady’s little turns of thought.

“Very well, madam,” said the lawyer, rising, “that finishes our business for to-day, I think. But I beg to congratulate you on your son’s return. I cannot call to mind that I have heard of it before. Every one will be delighted to see him. Even in his father’s time, everybody was full of him. When may we hope to see him, Lady Waldron?”

“Before very long, I have reason for good hope,” the lady replied, with a smile restoring much of the beauty of her careworn face. “I have not heard the day yet; but I know that he will come. He has to obtain permission from all the proper authorities, of course. And that is like your very long and very costly processes of the Great British law, Mr. Webber. But now I will entreat of you to excuse me any more. I have given very long attention. Mr. Webber, will you then oblige me by being the host to Mr. Penniloe? The refreshment is in the approximate room.”

“Devilish fine woman,” Mr. Webber whispered, as

her ladyship sailed away. "Wonderfully clever too! How she does her w's—I don't know much about them, but I always understood, that there never was any one born out of England, who could make head or tail of his w's. Why, she speaks English quite like a native! But I see you are looking at me. Shocking manners, I confess, to swear in the presence of a parson, sir; though plenty of them do it—ha, ha, ha!—in their own absence, I suppose."

"It is not my presence, Mr. Webber. That makes it neither better nor worse. But the presence of God is everywhere."

"To be sure! So it is. Come into the next room. Her ladyship said we should find something there. I suppose we shan't see Missy though," said the lawyer, as he led the Parson to the luncheon-table. "She fights very shy of your humble servant now. Girls never forgive that sort of thing. I don't often make such a mistake though, do I? And it was my son Waldron's fault altogether. Waldron is a sharp fellow, but not like me. Can't see very far into a milestone. Pity to stop the case, before we cleared Fox. I don't understand this new turn though. A straw shows the way the wind blows. Something behind the scenes, Mr. Penniloe. More there than meets the eye. Is it true that old Fox is dropping off the hooks?"

"If you mean to ask me, Mr. Webber, what I have heard about his state of health, I fear that there is little hope of his recovery. Dr. Fox returns to-morrow, as you may have heard through—through your especial agents. You know what my opinion is of that proceeding on your part."

"Yes, you spoke out pretty plainly. And, by George, you were right, sir! As fine a property as any in the county. I had no idea it was half as much. Why, bless my heart sir, Jemmy Fox will be worth his £8000 a year, they tell me!"

"I am glad that his worth," Mr. Penniloe said quietly, "is sufficient *per annum* to relieve him from your very dark suspicion."

"Got me there!" replied Webber, with a laugh. "Ah, you parsons always beat the lawyers. Bury us, don't you? If you find no other way. But we get the last fee after all. Probate, sir, Probate is an expensive thing. Well, I must be off. I see my gig is ready. If you can make my peace with Jemmy Fox, say a word for me. After all it looked uncommonly black, you know. And young men should be forgiving."

Scarcely had his loud steps ceased to ring, when a very light pit-a-pat succeeded, and Mr. Penniloe found himself in far more interesting company. Nicie came softly, and put back her hair, and offered her lovely white forehead to be kissed, and sat down with a smile that begged pardon for a sigh.

"Oh, Uncle Penniloe, I am so glad! I thought I should never have a talk with you again. My fortune has been so frightful lately. Everything against me, the same as it has been with this dear little soul here."

She pointed to *Jess*, the wounded one, who trotted in cheerfully upon three legs, with the other strapped up in a white silk pouch. The little doggie wagged her tail, and looked up at the Clergyman, with her large eyes full of soft gratitude and love; as by that reflex action, which a dog's eyes have without moving, they

took in—and told their intense delight in—that vigilant nurse, and sweet comrade, Nicie.

“Oh, she is so proud;” Miss Waldron said, looking twice as proud herself; “this is the first time that she has had the privilege of going upon three legs, without anybody’s hand; and she does think so much of herself! *Jess*, go and show Uncle Penniloe what she can do, now her health is coming back. *Jess*, go and cut a little caper—very steadily, you know, for fear of going twisty; and keep her tail up, all the time! Now *Jess* come, and have a pretty kiss; because she has earned it splendidly.

“She takes my breath away, because she is so good;” continued Nicie, leaning over her. “I have studied her character for six weeks now, and there is not a flaw to be found in it, unless it is a noble sort of jealousy. *Pixie*”—here *Jess* uttered a sharp small growl, and showed a few teeth as good as ever—“I must not mention his name again, because it won’t do to excite her; but he is out in the cold altogether, because he has never shown any heroism. No, no, he shan’t come, *Jess*. He is locked up, for want of chivalry. Oh, Uncle Penniloe, there is one question I have long been wanting to ask you. Do you think it possible for even God to forgive the man—the brute, I mean—who slashed this little dear like that, for being so loving, and so true?”

“My dear child,” Mr. Penniloe replied; “I have just been saying to myself, how like your dear father you are growing—in goodness and kindness of face, I mean. But when you look like that, the resemblance is quite lost. I should never have thought you capable of such a ferocious aspect.”

"Ah, that is because you don't know what I can do." But as she spoke, her arched brows were relaxing, and her flashing eyes filled with their usual soft gleam. "You forget that I am half a Spaniard still, or at any rate a quarter one, and therefore I can be very terrible sometimes. Ah, you should have seen me the other day. I let somebody know who I am. He thought perhaps that butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. Did not I astonish him, the impertinent low wretch?"

"Why, Niece, this is not at all like you! I always quote you as a model of sweet temper. Who can have aroused your angry passions thus?"

"Oh, never mind. I should like to tell you, and I want to tell you very much. But I am not permitted, though I don't know why. My mother has begged me particularly not to speak of that man who came—gentleman, I suppose he would call himself—but there, I am telling you all about him! And mother is so different, and so much more humble now. If she were still as unfair as she was, I should not be so particular. But she seems to be so sad, and so mysterious now, without accusing any one. And so I will not say a word against her orders. You would not wish it, Uncle Penniloe, I am sure."

"Certainly not, my dear. I will not ask another question. I have noticed that your mother is quite different myself. I hope she is not falling into really bad health."

"No, I don't think that. But into frightfully low spirits. We have enough to account for that, haven't we, Uncle Penniloe? To think of my dear father, all this time! What can I do? I am so wretchedly help-

less. I try to trust in God, and to say to myself—‘What does the earthly part matter, after all? When the soul is with the Lord, or only waiting for His time, and perhaps rewarded all the better—because—because of wicked treatment here.’ But oh, it won’t do, Uncle Penniloe, it won’t, when I think how noble and how good he was, and to be treated in that way! And then I fall away, and cry, and sob, and there comes such a pain—such a pain in my heart, that I have no breath left, and can only lie down, and pray that God would take me to my father. Is it wicked? I suppose it is. But how am I to help it?”

“No, my dear, it is not wicked to give way sometimes.” The Parson’s voice was tremulous, at sight of her distress, and remembrance of his own, not so very long ago. “Sorrow is sent to all of us, and doubtless for our good; and if we did not feel it, how could we be at all improved by it? But you have borne it well, my child; and so has your good mother, considering how the first sad blow has been doubled and prolonged so strangely. But now it will be better for you, ever so much better, Nicie, with your dear brother home again.”

“But when will that be? Perhaps not for years. We do not even know where he is. They were not likely to stay long in Malta. He may be at the Cape of Good Hope by this time, if the ship has had long enough to get there. Everything seems to be so much against us.”

“Are you sure that you are right, my dear?” Mr. Penniloe asked with no little surprise. “From what your mother said just now, I hoped that I should see my old pupil very soon.”

"I am afraid not, Uncle Penniloe. My dear mother seems to confuse things a little, or not quite understand them. Through her late illness, no doubt it is. We have not had a word from Tom, since that letter, which had such a wonderful effect, as I told you, when you were gone to London. And then, if you remember, he had no idea how long they were to be at Valetta. And he said nothing about their future movements very clearly. So full of his duties, no doubt, that he had no time to write long particulars. Even now he may never have heard of—of what has happened, and our sad condition. They may have been at sea, ever since he wrote. Soldiers can never tell where they may have to be."

"That has always been so, and is a part of discipline;" the Parson was thinking of the Centurion and his men. "But even if your letter should have gone astray, they must have seen some English newspapers, I should think."

"Tom is very clever, as you know, Uncle Penniloe; but he never reads a word, when he can help it. And besides that, it is only fair to remember that he is under Government. And the Government never neglects an opportunity of turning right into left, and the rest upside down. If all the baggage intended for their draft, was sent to the West Indies, because they were ordered to the East, it ought to follow that their letters would go too. But the worst of it is that one cannot be sure they will stick to a mistake, after making it."

"It is most probable that they would; especially if it were pointed out to them. Your dear father told me that they never forgive anybody for correcting them."

But how then could your mother feel so sure about Tom's coming home almost immediately?"

"It puzzles me, until I have time to think;" answered Nicie, looking down. "She has never said a word to me about it, beyond praying and hoping for Tom to come home. Oh, I know, or at least I can guess, how! She may have had a dream—she believes firmly in her dreams, and she has not had time to tell me yet."

Mr. Penniloe had no right to seek further, and no inclination so to do. The meanest, mangiest, and most sneaking understrapper of that recent addition to our liberal institutions—the "Private Enquiry Firm"—could never have suspected Nicie Waldron, after looking at her, of any of those subterfuges, which he (like a slack-skin'd worm) wriggles into. But on the other hand who could suppose that Lady Waldron would endeavour to mislead her own man of business by a trumpery deceit? And yet who was that strange visitor, of whom her daughter was not allowed to speak?

Unable to understand these things, the curate shortly took his leave, being resolved, like a wise man, to think as little as he could about them, until Time—that mighty locksmith, at whom even Love rarely wins the latest laugh—should bring his skeleton key to bear on the wards of this enigma.

What else can a busy man do, when puzzled even by his own affairs? And how much more must it be so, in the business of other persons, which he doubts his right to meddle with? Perhaps it would have been difficult to find any male member of our race more deeply moved by the haps and mishaps of his fellow-creatures than this Parson of Perlycross; and yet he

could take a rosier view for most of them than they took for themselves. So when he left the grounds of Walderscourt, he buttoned up his Spencer, and stepped out bravely, swinging his stick vigorously, and trusting in the Lord.

"What did 'e hat me vor, like that?" cried a voice of complaint from a brambled ditch, outside a thick copse known as Puddicombe Wood. Mr. Penniloe had not got his glasses on, and was grieved to feel rather than to see, although he was at the right end of his stick, that he had brought it down (with strong emphasis of a passage in his coming sermon) on the head of a croucher in that tangled ditch.

"Oh I beg your pardon! I am so sorry. I had not the least idea there was anybody there. I was thinking of the Sower, and the cares that choke the seed. But get up, and let me see what I have done. What made you hide yourself down there? I am not the game-keeper. Why, it is Sam Speccotty! Poaching again, I am afraid, Sam. But I hope I have not hurt you—so very much."

"Bruk' my head in two. That's what you have done, Passon. Oh you can't goo to tell on me, after hatting me on the brains with clubstick! Ooh, ooh, ooh! I be gooming to die, I be."

"Speccotty, no lies, and no shamming!" Mr. Penniloe put on his spectacles, for he knew his customer well enough,—a notorious poacher, but very seldom punished, because he was considered "a natural." "This is no clubstick, but a light walking-stick; and between it and your head there was a thick briar, as well as this vast mop of hair. Let me see what you have got under that tree-root."

Sam had been vainly endeavouring to lead his Minister away from his own little buried napkin, or rather sack of hidden treasure. "Turn it out;" commanded the Parson, surprised at his own austerity.

"A brace of cock-pheasants, a couple of woodcocks, two couple of rabbits, and a leash of hares! Oh, Sam, Sam! What have you done? Speccotty, I am ashamed of you."

"Bain't no oother chap within ten maile," said Speccotty, regarding the subject from a different point of view; "as could a' dooded that, since dree o'clock this marnin'; now Passon do 'e know of wan?"

"I am happy to say that I do not; neither do I wish for his acquaintance. Give up your gun, Sam. Even if I let you off, I insist upon your tools; as well as all your plunder."

"Han't a got no goon," replied the poacher, looking slyly at the Parson, through the rough shock of his hair. "Never vired a goon, for none on 'un. Knows how to vang 'un, wi'out thiccy."

"I can well believe that." Mr. Penniloe knew not a little of poachers, from his boyish days, and was not without that secret vein of sympathy for them, which every sportsman has, so long as they elude and do not defy the law. "But I must consider what I shall do. Send all this to my house to-night, that I may return it to the proper owners. Unless you do that, you will be locked up to-morrow."

"Oh Passon, you might let me have the Roberts. To make a few broth for my old moother."

"Not a hair, nor a feather shall you keep. Your mother shall have some honest broth—but none of your

stolen rabbits, Speccotty. You take it so lightly, that I fear you must be punished."

"Oh don't 'e give me up, sir. Oh, my poor head do go round so! Don't 'e give me up, for God's sake, Passon. Two or dree things I can tell 'e, as 'e 'd give the buttons off thy coat to know on. Do 'e mind when the Devil wor seen on Hagdon Hill, the day avore the good lady varled all down the Harseshoe?"

"I do remember hearing some foolish story, Sam, and silly people being frightened by some strange appearances, very easily explained, no doubt."

"You volk, as don't zee things, can make 'un any colour to your own liking. But I tell 'e old Nick goood into the body of a girt wild cat up there; and to this zide of valley, her be toorned to a black dog. Zayeth so in the Baible, don't 'un?"

"I cannot recall any passage, Sam, to that effect; though I am often surprised by the knowledge of those who use Holy Scripture for argument, much more freely than for guidance. And I fear that is the case with you."

"Whuther a' dooded it, or whuther a' did not, I be the ekal of 'un, that I be. When her coom to me, a'gapin' and a yawnin', I up wi' bill-hook, and I gie'd un' zummat. If 'tis gone back to hell a' harth, a' wun't coom out again, I reckon, wi'out Sam Speccotty's mark on 'un. 'Twill zave 'e a lot of sarmons, Passon. Her 'ont want no more knockin' on the head, this zide of Yester, to my reckoning. Hor! Passon be gone a'ready; a' don't want to hear of that. Taketh of his trade away. Ah, I could tell 'un zomethin', if a' wadn't such a softie."

Mr. Penniloe had hastened on, and no longer swung

his holly-stick; not through fear of knocking any more skulking poachers on the head, but from the sadness which always fell upon him, at thought of the dark and deadly blow the Lord had been pleased to inflict on him.

CHAPTER VI.

FRANKLY SPEAKING.

SUPPOSING a man to be engaged—as he often must be even now, when the general boast of all things is, that they have done themselves by machinery—in the useful and interesting work of sinking a well, by his own stroke and scoop; and supposing that, when he is up to his hips, and has not got a dry thread upon him, but reeks and drips, like a sprawling jelly-fish—at such a time there should drop upon him half a teaspoonful of water from the bucket he has been sending up—surely one might expect that man to accept with a smile that little dribble, even if he perceives it.

Alas, he does nothing of the kind! He swears, and jumps, as if he were in a shower-bath of vitriol, then he shouts for the ladder, drags his drenched legs up, and ascends for the purpose of thrashing his mate, who has dared to let a drop slip down on him. Such is the case; and no ratepayer who has had to delve for his own water (after being robbed by sewage-works) will fail to perceive the force of it.

Even so (if it be lawful to compare small things with great), even so it has been, and must be for ever, with a young man over head and ears in love, and digging in the depths of his own green gault. He throws back his head, and he shovels for his life; he scorns the poor

fellows who are looking down upon him; and he sends up bucketfuls of his own spooning, perhaps in the form of gravelly verse. The more he gets waterlogged the deeper is his glow, and the bowels of the earth are as goldbeaters' skin to him. But let anybody cast cold water, though it be but a drop, on his fervid frozen loins, and up he comes with both fists clenched.

These are the truths that must be cited, in explanation of the sad affair next to be recorded—the quarrel between two almost equally fine fellows,—Dr. Jemmy Fox to wit, and Master Frank Gilham. These two had naturally good liking for each other. There was nothing very marvellous about either of them; although their respective mothers perceived a heavenful of that quality. But they might be regarded as fair specimens of Englishmen—more wonderful perhaps than admirable in the eyes of other races. If it were needful for any one to make choice between them, that choice would be governed more by points of liking, than of merit. Both were brave, straightforward, stubborn, sensible, and self-respecting fellows, a little hot-headed sometimes perhaps, but never consciously unjust.

It seemed a great pity, that such a pair should fall away from friendship, when there were so many reasons for goodwill and amity; not to mention gratitude—that flower of humanity, now extinct, through the number of its cuttings that have all damped off. Jemmy Fox indeed had cherished a small slip of that, when Gilham stood by him in his first distress; but unhappily the slightest change of human weather is inevitably fatal to our very miffy plant.

Young as he was, Frank Gilham had been to market

already too many times, to look for offal value in gratitude, and indeed he was too generous to regard it as his due; still his feelings of friendship, and of admiration for the superior powers of the other, were a little aggrieved when he found himself kept at a distance, and avoided, for reasons which he understood too well. So when he heard that young Dr. Fox had returned from that visit to his father, he rode up to *Old Barn*, to call upon him, and place things upon a plainer footing.

Jemmy received him in a friendly manner, but with his mind made up to put a stop to any nonsense concerning his sister Christie, if Gilham should be fool enough to afford him any opening. And this the young yeoman did without delay, for he saw no good reason why he should be made too little of.

"And how did you leave Miss Fox?" he asked, as they took their chairs opposite the great fireplace, in the bare room, scientific with a skull or two, and artistic with a few of Christie's water-colour sketches.

"I had no difficulty in leaving her," Jemmy answered, with a very poor attempt at wit, which he intended to be exasperating.

"How was she, I mean? I dare say you got away, without thinking much of anybody but yourself." Frank Gilham was irritated, as he deserved to be.

"Thank you; well, I think upon the whole," Jemmy Fox drawled out his words, as if his chin were too slack to keep them going, and he stroked it in a manner which is always hateful; "yes, I think I may say upon the whole, that she was quite as well as can be expected. I hope you can say the same of your dear mother."

Frank Gilham knew that he was challenged to the combat; and he came forth, as the duty is, and the habit of an Englishman.

"This is not the first time you have been rude to me;" he said. "And I won't pretend not to know the reason. You think that I have been guilty of some presumption, in daring to lift my eyes to your sister."

"To tell you the truth," replied Fox getting up, and meeting his steadfast gaze steadfastly; "you have expressed my opinion, better than I could myself have put it."

"It is not the sort of thing one can argue about," said the other, also rising; "I know very well that she is too good for me, and has the right to look ever so much higher. But for all that, I have a perfect right to set my heart upon her; especially considering—considering, that I can't help it. And if I do nothing to annoy her, or even to let her know of my presumption, what right have you to make a grievance of it?"

"I have never made a grievance of it. I simply wish you to undersand, that I do not approve of it."

"You have a perfect right to disapprove; and to let me know that you do so. Only it would have been more to your credit, if you had done it in an open manner, and in plain English; instead of cutting me, or at any rate dropping my acquaintance. I don't call that straightforward."

"The man is a jackess. What rot he talks! Look here, my fine fellow. How could I speak to you about it, before you acknowledged your infatuation? Could I come up to you in the street, and say—'Hi there! You are in love with my sister, are you? If you want to keep

a sound skin, you'll haul off.' Is that the straightforward course I should have taken?"

"Well, there may be something in the way you put it. But I would leave it to anybody, whether you have acted fairly. And why should I haul off, I should like to know. I won't haul off, for fifty of you. Because I have got no money, I suppose! How would you like to be ordered to haul off from Miss Waldron, in case you were to lose your money, or anything went against you? Instead of hauling off, I'll hold on—in my own mind, at any rate. I don't want a farthing of the money of your family. I would rather not have it,—dirty stuff, what good is it? But I tell you what—if your dear sister would only give me one good word, I would snap my fingers at you, and everybody. I know I am nothing at all. However, I am quite as good as you are; though not to be spoken of, in the same week with her. I tell you, I don't care twopence for any man, or all the men in the world put together—if only your sister thinks well of me. So now, you know what you may look out for."

"All this is very fine; but it won't do, Gilham." Fox thought he saw his way to settle him. "Surely you are old enough to see the folly of getting so excited. My sister will very soon be married to Sir Henry Haggerstone—a man of influence, and large fortune. And you—, well to some lady, who can see your value, through a ball of glass, as you do. That power is not given to all of us; but on no account would I disparage you. And when this little joke is over, you will come, and beg my pardon; and we shall be hearty friends again."

"Sir Henry Haggerstone!" Gilham replied, in a tone of contempt, which would justly have astonished that exemplary baronet. "Not she! Why that's the old codger that has had three wives—fiddles, and fiddlesticks, I'm not afraid of him! But just tell me one thing now, upon your honour. Would you object to me, if she liked me, and I had a hundred thousand pounds?"

"Well, no, I don't know that I should, Mr. Gilham."

"Then, Dr. Fox, you would sell your sister, for a hundred thousand pounds. And if she likes to put a lower price upon herself, what right have you to stop her?"

"I tell you, Gilham, all this is childish talk. If Christie has been fool enough to take a fancy to you, it is your place, as a man of honour, to bear in mind how young she is; and to be very careful that you do nothing to encourage it."

"But there is no chance of such luck. Has it ever seemed likely to you, my dear Jemmy, that she—that she even had any idea——"

"A great deal too much, I am afraid. At least, I don't mean to say that exactly—but at any rate—well, enough to place you on your honour."

"And upon my honour I will be—not to neglect any shadow of a chance, that turns up in my favour. But I can never believe it, Jemmy; she is ever so much too lofty, and too lovely, and too clever—did anybody ever see such fingers, and such eyes, and such a smile, and such a voice? And altogether——"

"Altogether a pack of rubbish. The sooner you

order your horse, the better. I can't have you raving here, and fetching all the parish up the hill."

"I am a sensible man, Jemmy Fox. I know a noble thing, when I see it. You are too small of nature, and too selfish for such perception. But you may abuse me, to your heart's content. You will never get a harsh word in reply; after what you have told me. Because there must be good in you, or you would never have such a sister. I shall take my own course now; without the smallest consideration for your crotchets. Now don't make any mistake about that. And as for honour—clearly understand, that I shall pitch it to the Devil."

"Well, don't come here with any more of your raving. And don't expect me to encourage you. You have been a good fellow—I don't mind saying that—until you took this infernal craze."

"Oh, I won't trouble you; never you fear. You are doing what you think right, no doubt; and you are welcome to do your worst. Only there is one thing I must say. I know that you are too much of a man, to belie me to your sister, or run me down, behind my back. Shake hands, Jemmy, before I go; perhaps we shall never shake hands again."

"Get somebody to leave you that hundred thousand pounds," said Fox, as he complied with this request; "and then we'll shake hands all day long, instead of shaking fists at each other."

"Jem Crow said to his first wife's mother,
What right have you to be anybody's brother?"

Gilham responded, being in high spirits, with this quotation from that piece of negro doggerel, with which

all England was at that time crazed. And thus they parted, with a neutral smile; and none the less perhaps, for that each of them perceived that the parting would prove a long one.

"What will Nicie have to say about all this? I shall not be contented until I know;" said Fox to himself, when his visitor was gone; "I have a great mind to go and get my riding-gaiters. That blessed mother of hers can scarcely growl at me, if I call to-day; considering how long I have been away. I seem to knock under to everybody now. I can't think what has come over me."

When a man begins to think that of himself, it shows that he is getting pugnacious, and has not found his proper outlet. The finest thing for him is a long ride then; or a long walk, if he has only two legs. Fox was shaking down upon his merits, but still a little crusty with himself, and therefore very much so with every one outside it, when his pretty mare pulled up, to think about the water she was bound to walk through at Priestwell.

This is one of the fairest hamlets to be found in England. There are houses enough to make one think of the other people that live in them; but not so many as to make it certain that a great many people will be nasty. You might expect, if you lived there, to know something about everybody in the place; and yet only to lift up your hands, and smile, when they did a thing you were too wise to do. The critical inhabitant in such a place—unless he is very wicked—must be happy. He falls into a habitude of small smiles; "many a mickle makes a muckle"—if that be the right way to quote it, which it isn't—however, the result is all the same, he knows what he is about, and it leads him to smile

twenty times, for one smile he would have had in town.

All these things were producing a fine effect upon the character of Dr. Gronow. By head and shoulders, without standing up for himself for a single moment, he was the biggest man at Priestwell; in knowledge of the world, in acquaintance with books, in power to give good advice, and to help the people who took it—the largest. And after the many hot contentions of his life, and the trouble in being understood (where the game never pays for the candle) here he was taken at his own appraisal, after liberal prepayment.

He was not a bad man, take him all in all; though inclined by nature to be many-angled, rather than many-sided. And now, as he stood on the plank that goes over the brook where the road goes under it, he was about as happy as the best of men can be. The old Doctor in truth was as full of delight—though his countenance never expressed it—as the young Doctor was of dejection. And why? For the very noble reason, that the wiser man now had his fly-rod in hand, fly-book in pocket, creel on back, and waterproof boots upon stiff but sturdy legs. And, main point of all—he was just setting forth; his return must be effected perhaps in quite another pair of shoes.

The Priestwell water flows into the Perle from the north, some half mile higher up than the influx of Susscot brook from the south, and it used to be full of bright stickles and dark hovers, peopled with many a bouncing trout. For a trout of a pound is a bouncer there; and a half-pounder even is held a comely fish; and sooth to say, the angler is not so churlish as to

fail of finding joy in one of half that size. Not a sign of Spring was on the earth as yet, and very little tidings of it in the air; but any amount was in the old man's heart, as he listened to the warbling of the brook, and said to himself that he should catch, perhaps, a fish. He was going to fish downwards, as he always did, for he never liked to contradict the water. At the elbow of the stream was his own willow-tree, at the bottom of his lawn, and there a big fish lived—the Dr. Gronow of the liquid realm, who defied the Dr. Gronow of the dry land. Ha, why not tackle him this very afternoon, and ennoble the opening day thereby; for the miserable floods, and the long snow-time, and the shackling of the stream is over; no water-colour artist could have brought the stickles to a finer fishing tint; and lo, there is a trout upon the rise down there, tempted by the quiver of a real iron-blue!

With these thoughts glowing in his heart, and the smoke of his pipe making rings upon the naked alder-twigs, he was giving his flies the last titivating touch—for he always fished with three, though two were one too many—when he heard a voice not too encouraging.

“I say, Doctor, if you don't look out, you'll be certain to get bogged, you know.”

“Don't care if I do;” replied the Doctor, whisking his flies around his head, and startling *Perle* with the flash of his rod.

“You had better go home,” continued Jemmy, “and let the banks dry up a bit, and some of your fish have time to breed again. Why, the floods must have washed them all down into the *Perle*; and the *Perle* must have washed them all down into the sea.”

"That shows how much you know about it. I have got a most splendid patent dodge, at the bottom of my last meadow. I'll show it to you some fine day, if you are good. It is so constructed that it keeps all my trout from going down into the Perle, and yet it lets all the Perle trout come up to me; and when they are up, they can't get back again of course. And the same thing reversed, at the top of my grounds. I expect to have more fish than pebbles in my brook. And nobody can see it, that's the beauty of it. But mind, you mustn't say a word about it, Jemmy. People are so selfish!"

"Of course, I won't; you may trust me. But when you have got everybody else's fish in your water, can you get them out of it? I know nothing at all about it. But to make any hand at angling, is it not the case that you must take to it in early life? Look at Pike, for instance. What a hand he is! Never comes home without a basketful. He'll be here again next week, I believe."

Fox knew well enough that Dr. Gronow hated the very name of Pike.

"I am truly sorry to hear it. I am sure it must be high time for that lad to go to College. Penniloe ought to be sent to prison, for keeping such a poacher. But as for myself, if I caught too many, I should not enjoy it half so much, because I should think there was no skill in it."

"Well, now, I never thought of that. And *pari ratione* if we save too many of our patients, we lay ourselves open to the charge of luck."

"No fear for you, Jemmy. You are not a lucky

fellow. Come in and have a talk with me, by and by. I want to hear the last news, if there is any."

"Yes, there is some. But I must tell you now, or never. For I have to ride round through Pumpington. And I came this way on purpose to get the benefit of your opinion."

"But, my dear fellow, it gets dark so soon;" Dr. Gronow looked wistfully at his flies. "Well, if you won't be more than five minutes, I will put an iron-blue on, instead of a Half-Kingdon. But don't be longer than you can help. You are the only man in the parish I would stop for."

Omitting all description, except of persons, Fox told the elder doctor what he had learned at the mouth of the Mendip mine, and at the *Smoking Limekiln*, as well as what he knew of Harvey Tremlett from Mr. Peniloe's account, reminding him also of Joe Crang's description, and showing how well it tallied.

"My advice can be given in a word; and that is 'Not a word;'" answered Gronow, forgetting his flies for the moment. "Not a word to any one, but Mockham the magistrate; and not even to him, until needful. Shrove-Tuesday, you say, is the date of the Fair. Don't apply for your warrant, until that morning, if you can get it then without delay. Only you must make sure that Mockham will be at home to issue it, and you must have Joe Crang there quietly, and gag him somewhere for the rest of the day—perhaps a little opiate in his beer. You see it is of the first importance that not a word should leak out about your intention of nabbing those fellows at the Fair, until you are down upon them; for your birds would never come near the trap. It is

perfectly amazing how such things spread, faster than any bird can fly; for the whole world seems to be in league against the law. There is plenty of time for us to talk it over, between this and then, if you only keep it close. Of course you have not mentioned it to anybody yet."

"Not to a soul. I had sense enough for that. But I might have done so before long, if I had missed meeting you to-day. Shall I not tell even Penniloe? He has known everything hitherto."

"Certainly not yet. He is quite safe of course, so far as mere intention goes; but he might make a slip, and he is a nervous man. For his own sake, he had better not have this upon his mind. And his ideas are so queer. If he were questioned, I feel sure that he would not even tell a white lie; but be frightfully clumsy, and say, 'I refuse to answer.' Better tell the whole truth than do that; for suspicion is shrewder than certainty."

"But I don't like concealing it from him at all. I fear he will be hurt, when he comes to know it; because we have acted together throughout, and the matter so closely concerns his parish."

"Have no fear, Jemmy. I'll make that all right. We will tell him about it on the day of action, and let him know that for his own sake only, I persuaded you to keep it from him. Why, that fellow's daughter is in his house, and a wonderfully clever imp, they say. And I am not at all sure that he would not preach about it. He thinks so much more of people's souls, than of their parts that are rational."

"Very well then, for his own sake, I won't say a

word to him about it. You are right; it would make him miserable to have such a shindy so long in prospect. For it will be a rare fight, I can tell you. The fellow is as big as an elephant almost; and my namesake, Jem Kettel, is a stuggy young chap, very likely to prove a tough customer. And then there will be Timberlegs, whoever he may be."

"All right, Jemmy, we will give a good account of them. Mind *v.* Matter always wins the verdict. But let me congratulate you upon your luck. We must get to the bottom of this strange affair now, if we can only nab those fellows."

"I should hope so. But how do you think it will prove? Who will be detected as the leading villain? For these rogues have only been hired of course."

"Well, I own myself puzzled, Jemmy, worse than ever. Until this last news of yours, I was inclined to think that there had been some strange mistake all through, while the good Colonel slept still undisturbed. But now it appears that I must have been wrong. And I hardly like to tell you my last idea, because of your peculiar position."

"I know what you mean, and I thank you for it," Fox replied with a rapid glance. "But to my mind that seems the very reason why I should know everything."

"Well, if you take it so, friend Jemmy, as my first theory is now proved wrong, my second one is that Lady Waldron knows more about this matter than anybody else. She has always shown herself hostile to you, so that my idea cannot shock you, as otherwise it might. Are you angry with me?"

"Not in the least; though I cannot believe it, thereby

returning good for evil; for she was quick enough to believe it—or feign to do so—about me. There are things that tend towards your conclusion. I am sorry to acknowledge that there are. And yet, until it is positively proved, I will not think it possible. She is no great favourite of mine, you know, any more than I am of hers. Also, I am well aware that women do things a man never would believe; and some women don't mind doing anything. But I cannot persuade myself that she is one of that sort. She has too much pride to be a hypocrite."

"So I should have thought. But against facts, where are you? Shrove Tuesday will tell us a thing or two however. That is a very nice mare of yours. I know nothing of horses, but judge them by their eyes; though their legs are the proper study. Good-bye, my boy! Perhaps I shall amaze you with a dish of trout to-morrow. They are always in very fine condition here."

CHAPTER VII.

A GREAT PRIZE.

ONE of the beauties of this world is, for the many who are not too good for it, that they never can tell what may turn up next, and need not over-exert themselves in the production of novelty, because somebody will be sure to do it for them. And those especially who have the honour and pleasure of dealing with the gentler sex are certain, without any effort of their own, to encounter plenty of vicissitude.

Such was the fortune of Dr. Fox, when he called that day at Walderscourt. He found his sweet Nicie

in a sad condition, terribly depressed, and anxious, in consequence of a long interview with her mother, which had been as follows.

For the last fortnight, or three weeks, Lady Waldron had not recovered strength, but fallen away even more, declining into a peculiar and morbid state. Sometimes gloomy, downcast, and listless, secluding herself, and taking very little food, and no exercise whatever; at other times bewildered, excited, and restless, beginning a sentence and breaking it off, laughing about nothing, and then morose with every one. Pretty Tamar Haddon had a great deal to put up with, and probably would not have shown the needful patience, except for handsome fees lightly earned by reports collected in the village. But Sergeant Jakes being accessible no more—for he had cast off the spell in the Abbey, that Sunday—poor Lady Waldron's anxiety was fed with tales of very doubtful authority. And the strange point was that she showed no impatience at the tardiness of the enquiry now, but rather a petulant displeasure at its long continuance.

Now that very morning, while Fox was on the road to call upon his beloved, she was sent for suddenly by her mother, and hastened with some anxiety to the room which the widow now left so seldom. Inez had long been familiar with the truth that her mother's love for her was not too ardent; and she often tried—but without much success—to believe that the fault was on her part. The mother ascribed it very largely to some defect in her daughter's constitution. "She has not one drop of Spanish blood in her. She is all of English, except perhaps her eyes; and the eyes do not care to

see things of Spain." Thus she justified herself, unconscious perhaps that jealousy of the father's love for this pet child had been, beyond doubt, the first cause of her own estrangement.

This terribly harassed and lonely woman (with no one but God to comfort her, and very little sense of any consolation thus) was now forsaken by that support of pride and strength of passion, which had enabled her at first to show a resolute front to affliction. Leaning back upon a heavy couch, she was gazing without much interest at the noble ivory crucifix, which had once so strongly affected her, but now was merely a work of art, a subject for admiration perhaps, but not for love or enthusiasm. Of these there was no trace in her eyes, only apathy, weariness, despondence.

"Lock the outer door. I want no spies," she said in a low voice which alarmed her daughter; "now come and sit close to me in this chair. I will speak in my own language. None but you and I understand it here now."

"It is well, mother mine," replied her daughter, speaking also in Spanish; "but I wish it were equally well with you."

"It will never be well with me again, and the time will be long before it can be well with you. I have doubted for days about telling you, my child, because I am loth to grieve you. But the silence upon this matter is very bitter to me; moreover it is needful that you should know, in case of my obtaining the blessed release, that you also be not triumphed over. It is of that unholy outrage I must speak. Long has it been a black mystery to us. But I understand it now—alas, I cannot help understanding it!"

Inez trembled exceedingly; but her mother, though deadly pale, was calm. Both face and voice were under stern control, and there were no dramatic gestures.

"Never admit him within these doors, if I am not here to bar them. Never take his hand, never listen to his voice, never let your eyes rest upon his face. Never give him a crust, though he starve in a ditch; never let him be buried with holy rites. As he has treated my dear husband, so shall God treat him, when he is dead. It is for this reason that I tell you. If you loved your father, remember it."

"But who is it, mother? What man is this, who has abandoned his soul to the Evil One? Make me sure of his name, that I may obey you."

"The man who has done it is my own twin-brother, Rodrigo, Count de Varcas: Rodrigo, the accursed one."

The Spanish lady clasped her hands, and fell back against the wall, and dropped her eyes; as if the curse were upon her also, for being akin to the miscreant. Her daughter could find no words, and was in doubt of believing her own ears.

"Yes, I know well what I am saying," Lady Waldron began again with some contempt. "I am strong enough. Offer me nothing to smell. Shall I never die? I ought to have died, before I knew this, if there were any mercy in Heaven. That my twin-brother, my own twin-brother, the one I have loved and laboured for, and even insulted my own good husband, because he would not bow down to him—not for any glory, revenge, or religion, but for the sake of grovelling money—oh Inez, my child, that he should have done this!"

"But how do you know that he has done it? Has he made any confession, mother? Surely it is possible to hope against it, unless he himself has said so."

"He has not himself said so. He never does. To accuse himself is no part of his habits, but rather to blame every other. And such is his manner that every one thinks he must be right and his enemies wrong. But to those who have experience of him, the question is often otherwise. You remember that very—very faithful gentleman, who came to us, about a month ago?"

"Mother, can you mean that man, arrogant but low, who consumed all my dear father's boxes of cigars, and called himself Señor José Quevedo, and expected even me to salute him as of kin?"

"Hush, my child! He is your Uncle's foster-brother, and trusted by him in everything. You know that I have in the Journals announced my desire to hear from my beloved brother—beloved alas too much, and vainly. I was long waiting, I was yearning, having my son in the distance, and you who went against me in everything, to embrace and be strengthened by my only brother. What other friend had I on earth? And in answer to my anxiety arrives that man, sedate, mysterious, not to be doubted, but regarded as a lofty cavalier. I take him in, I trust him, I treat him highly, I remember him as with my brother always in the milky days of childhood, although but the son of a well-intentioned peasant. And then I find what? That he has come for money—for money, which has always been the bane of my only and well-born brother, for the very dismal reason that he cannot cling to it, and yet must have

both hands filled with it for ever. Inez, do you attend to me?"

"Mother, I am doing so, with all my ears; and with all my heart as well I heed. But these things surprise me much, because I have always heard from you that my Uncle Rodrigo was so noble, so chivalrous, so far above all Englishmen, by reason of the grandeur of his spirit."

"And in that style will he comport himself, upon most of life's occasions, wherein money does not act as an impediment. Of that character is he always, while having more than he can spend of it. But let him see the necessity, and the compulsion to deny himself, too near to him approaching, and he will not possess that loftiness of spirit, and benevolence universal. Departing from his larger condition of mind, he will do things which honour does not authorise. Things unworthy of the mighty Barcas, from whom he is descended. But the Barcas have often been strong and wicked; which is much better than weak and base."

Her ladyship paused, as in contemplation of the sterling nobility of her race, and apparently derived some comfort from the strong wickedness of the Barcas.

"Mother, I hope that it is not so." Nicie's view of excellence was milder. "You are strong but never wicked. I am not strong; but on the other hand, I trust, that I am not weak and base."

"You never can tell what you can do. You may be most wicked of the wicked yet. Those English girls, that are always good, are braised vegetables without pepper. The only one I ever saw to approve, was the

one who was so rude to me. How great her indignation was! She is worthy to be of Andalusia."

"But why should so wicked a thing be done—so horrible even from a stranger?" The flashing of Nicie's dark eyes was not unworthy of Andalusia. "How could the meanest greed of money be gratified by such a deed?"

"In this manner, if I understand aright. During the time of the French invasion, just before our marriage, the Junta of our City had to bear a great part of the burden of supporting and paying our brave troops. They fell into great distress for money, which became scarcer and scarcer, from the terrible war, and the plundering. All lovers of their country came with both hands full of treasure; and among them my father contributed a loan of noble magnitude, which has impaired for years to come the fortunes of our family. For not a *peseta* will ever be repaid, inasmuch as there was no security. When all they could thus obtain was spent, and the richest men would advance no more, without prospect of regaining it, the Junta (of which my father was a member) contrived that the City should combine with them in pledging its revenues, which were large, to raise another series of loans. And to obtain these with more speed, they appealed to the spirit of gambling; which is in the hearts of all men, but in different forms and manners.

"One loan that was promulgated thus amounted to 100,000 dollars, contributed in twenty shares of 5,000 dollars each: and every share was to have a life of not less than fifteen years in age appointed to represent it. No money was to be repaid; but the interest to ac-

cumulate, until nineteen out of those twenty lives became extinct, and thereupon the whole was to go to the last survivor, and by that time it would be a very large sum. I believe that the scheme came from the French, who are wonderfully clever in such calculations; whereas finance is not of us. Do you seem to yourself to understand it?"

"Not very much, but to some extent. I have read of a wheel of life; and this appears to me to be a kind of wheel of death."

"So it is, my child. You can scarcely be so stupid, as you have been described to me. I am not too strong of the arithmetic science, though in other ways not wanting. You will see, that there was a royal treasure thus, increasing for the one who should deserve it, by having more of life than the nineteen others, and acquiring it thus, for the time he had to come. That kind of lottery, coming from Paris, was adopted by other Governments, under the title of *Tontine*, I think. My dear father, who was a warm patriot, but unable to contribute more without hope of return, accepted two of those five thousand dollar shares, and put into one the name of my brother, and into the other that of my dear husband, then about to be: because those two were young, while himself was growing old. Your father has spoken to me of his share, several times, as it became of greater value; and he provided for it in his will, supposing that he should ever become the possessor, although he approved not of any kind of gambling.

"If you can represent to yourself that scheme, you will see that each share was enlarged in prospect, as the others failed of theirs by death; and, of the twenty

lives appointed, the greater part vanished rapidly; many by war, and some by duels, and others by accident and disease; until it appears—though we knew it not—that your father and your Uncle Rodrigo were the sole survivors. Your father and I kept no watch upon it, being at such a distance; but now I have learned that your Uncle has been exceedingly acute and vigilant, having no regard for your dear father, and small affection, I fear, for me; but a most passionate devotion to the huge treasure now accumulated upon heavy interest, and secured by the tolls of the City.

“I am grieved by discovering from this man Quevedo, that your Uncle has been watching very keenly everything that has happened here; he has employed an agent, whose name I could not by any means extort from Quevedo, and not contented with his reports, but excited by the tidings of your father’s ill-health, he has even been present in these parts himself, to reconnoitre for himself; for he is capable of speaking English, even better than I do. Quevedo is very cautious; but by plying him with Spanish wine, such as he cannot procure in Spain, feigning also to be on his side, I extorted from him more than he wished to part with. No suspicion had I, while he was here, that his master was guilty of the black disgrace thus inflicted upon us: or can you imagine that I would allow that man to remain in the house of the outraged one? And Quevedo himself either feigns, or possesses, total ignorance of this vile deed.”

“But, mother dear, how did this suspicion grow upon you? And for what purpose—if I may inquire—was that man Quevedo sent to you?”

“He was sent with two objects. To obtain my

signature to an attested declaration as to the date of your father's death; and in the second place to borrow money for the support of your Uncle's claim. It could not be expected that the City would discharge so vast a sum (more than five hundred thousand crowns they say) without interposing every possible obstacle and delay; and our family, through your Uncle's conduct, has lost all the influence it possessed when I was young. I am pleased to think now that he must be disappointed with the very small sum which I advanced, in my deep disgust at discovering, that at the very time when I was sighing and languishing for his support, he was at my very doors, but through his own selfish malignity avoided his twin-sister. Quevedo meant not to have told me that. But alas! I extorted it from him, after a slip of his faithful tongue. For you know, I believe, that your father and uncle were never very friendly. My brother liked not that I should wed an Englishman; all men of this nation he regarded with contempt, boasting as they did in our country, where we permitted them to come and fight. But you have never been told, my child, that the scar upon your dear father's face was inflicted by your Uncle's sword, employed (as I am ashamed to confess) in an unfair combat. Upon recovering from the stealthy blow, your father in his great strength could have crushed him to death, for he was then a stripling; but for my sake he forbore. It has been concealed from you. There is no concealment now."

"Oh, mother, how savage and ignominious also! I wonder that you ever could desire to behold such a man again; and that you could find it in your heart to receive his envoy kindly."

"Many years have passed since then, my child. And we have a saying, 'To a fellow-countryman forgive much, and to a brother everything.' Your father had forgiven him, before the wound was healed. Much more slowly did I forgive. And, but for this matter, never would I have spoken."

"Oh, mother dear, you have had much sorrow! I have never considered it, as I should have done. A child is like an egg, as you say in Spain, that demands all the warmth for itself, and yields none. Yet am I surprised, that knowing so much of him, you still desired his presence, and listened to the deceits of his messenger. But you have wisdom; and I have none. Tell me then what he had to gain, by an outrage hateful to a human being, and impossible to a Christian."

"It is not clear, my child, to put it to your comprehension. The things that are of great power with us are not in this Country so copious. We are loftier. We are more friendly with the Great Powers that reside above. In every great enterprise, we feel what would be their own sentiments; though not to be explained by heretical logic. Your Uncle has never been devoted to the Church, and has profited little by her teaching; but he is not estranged from her so much, that he need in honour hesitate to have use and advantage from her charitable breast. For she loves every one, even those who mock her, with feeble imitation of her calls."

"Mother, but hitherto you have cared little or nothing for Holy Church. You have allowed me to wander from her; and my mind is the stronger for the exercise. Why then this new zeal and devotion?"

"Inez, the reason is very simple; although you may

not understand it yet. We love the Institutions that make much of us, even when we are dead, and comfort our bodies with ceremonies, and the weepers with reasons for smiling. This heretic corporation, to which Mr. Penniloe belongs, has many good things imitated from us; but does not understand itself. Therefore, it is not a power in the land, to govern the law, or to guide great actions of property and of behaviour, as the Holy Catholic Church can do, in the lands where she has not been deposed. Knowing how such things are with us, your Uncle (as I am impelled to believe), having plenty of time for preparation, had arranged to make one master-stroke, towards this great object of his life. At once to bring all the Ecclesiastics to his side with fervour, and before the multitude to prove his claim in a manner the most dramatic.

“Behold it thus, as upon a stage! The whole City is agitated with the news, and the immensity of his claim. The young men say that it is just to pay it, if it can be proved, for the honour of the City. But the old men shake their heads, and ask where is the money to come from; what new tolls can be imposed; and who can believe a thing, that must be proved by the oaths of foreign heretics?

“Lo there appears the commanding figure of the Count de Varcas before the great Cathedral doors; behind him a train of sailors bear the body of the great British warrior, well-known among the elder citizens by his lofty stature and many wounds, renowned among the younger as a mighty hero. The Bishop, Archbishop, and all powers of the Church (being dealt with privately beforehand) are moved to tears by this Act of Grace,

this manifest conversion of a noble Briton, claiming the sacred rites of *Campo Santo*, and not likely to enjoy them without much munificence, when that most righteous claim upon the Seculars is paid. Dares any one to doubt identity? Behold, upon the finger of the departed one is the very ring with which the City's benefactor sealed his portion of the covenant; and which he presented to his son-in-law, as a holy relic of his ancient family, upon betrothal to his daughter.

"Thereupon arises the universal cry—'redeem the honour of the City.' A few formalities still remain; one of which is satisfied by the arrival of Quevedo with my deposition. The noble Count, the descendant of the Barcas, rides in a chariot extolled by all, and scatters a few *pesetas* of his half a million dollars. It was gained by lottery, it goes by gambling; in six months he is penniless again. He has robbed his brother's grave in vain. For another hundred dollars, he would rob his twin-sister's."

"Oh, mother, it is horrible! Too horrible to be true. And yet how it clears up everything! And even so, how much better it is, than what we supposed, and shuddered at! But have you any evidence beyond suspicion? If it is not unbecoming, I would venture to remind you, that you have already in your mind condemned another, whose innocence is now established."

"Nay, not established, except to minds that are, like mine, full of charity. It is not impossible, that he may have joined my brother—oh that I should call him so!—in this abominable enterprise. I say it not, to vex you in your lofty faith. But it would have made that enterprise far easier to arrange. And if a noble Spaniard

can stoop thus, why should not a common Englishman?"

"Because he is a gentleman;" cried Nicie, rising with a flash of indignation, "which a nobleman sometimes is not. And since you have spoken thus, I doubt the truth of your other accusation. But that can very soon be put to the test, by making enquiry on the spot. If what you suppose has happened at all, it must be of public knowledge there. Have you sent any one to enquire about it?"

"Not yet. I have not long seen things clearly. Only since that Quevedo left, it has come upon me by reasoning. Neither do I know of any trusty person. It must be one faithful to the family, and careful of its reputation; for the disgrace shall never be known in this cold England. Remember therefore, I say, that you speak no word, not even to Mr. Penniloe, or Dr. Fox, of this conclusion forced upon me. If in justice to others we are compelled to avow that the deed was of the family, we must declare that it was of piety and high religious feeling, and strictly conceal that it was of sordid lucre."

"But mother, they may in the course of their own enquiries discover how it was at last. The last things ascertained tend that way. And if they should find any trace of ship——"

"I have given orders to drop all further searches. And you must use your influence with—with all you have any sway upon, that nothing more shall be done at present. Of course you will not supply the reason; but say that it has been so arranged. Now go, my child; I have talked too long. My strength is not as it was, and I dwell most heavily on the better days. But

one thing I would enjoin upon you. Until I speak again of that which I have seen in my own mind, to its distress and misery, ask me no more about it, neither in any way refer to it. The Lord,—who is not of this Church, or that, but looks down upon us from the Crucifix,—He can pity and protect us. But you will be glad that I have told you this; because it will devour me the less.”

CHAPTER VIII.

PLEADINGS.

“BUT it will devour me the more. My mother cannot love me;” the poor girl was obliged to think, as she sat in her lonely room again. “She has laid this heavy burden on me; and I am to share it with no one. Does she suppose that I feel nothing, and am wholly absorbed in love-proceedings, forgetting all duty to my father? Sometimes I doubt almost whether Jemmy Fox is worthy of my affection. I am not very precious. I know that—the lesson is often impressed upon me—but I know that I am simple, and loving, and true; and he takes me too much for granted. If he were noble, and could love with all his heart, would he be so hard upon his sister, for liking a man, who is her equal in everything but money? The next time I see him, I will try him about that. If a man is noble, as I understand the word, he will be noble for others, as well as for himself. Uncle Penniloe is the only real nobleman I know; because to him others are equal to himself.”

This was only a passing mood, and not practical enough to be permanent. However it was the prevail-

ing one, when in came Jemmy Fox himself. That young doctor plumed himself upon his deep knowledge of the fairer sex; and yet like the rest of mankind who do so, he showed little of that knowledge in his dealings with them.

In the midst of so many doubts and fears, and with a miserable sense of loneliness, Miss Waldron was in "a high-strung condition"—as ladies themselves describe it—though as gentle and affectionate as ever. She was gazing at little pet *Pixie*, and wondering in her self-abasement, whether there is any human love so deep, devoted, and everlasting (while his little life endures) as that of an ordinary dog. *Pixie*, the pug-dog, sitting at her feet, was absorbed in wistful watching, too sure that his mistress was plunged in trouble, beyond the reach of his poor mind, but not perhaps beyond the humble solace of such a yearning heart.

In this interchange of tender feelings, a still more tender vein was touched. "Squeak!" went *Pixie*, with a jump, and then a long eloquence of yelp and howl proved that he partook too deeply of the woe he had prayed to share. A heavy riding-boot had crushed his short but sympathetic tail—the tail he was so fond of chasing as a joyful vision, but now too mournfully and materially his own!

Dr. Fox, with a cheerful smile, as if he had done something meritorious, gazed into Nicie's sparkling eyes. Perhaps he expected a lovely kiss, after his long absence.

"Why, you don't seem to care a bit for what you have done!" cried the young girl, almost repelling him. "Allow me to go to my wounded little dear. Oh, you poor little persecuted pet, what did they do to you?"

Was his lovely taily broken? Oh the precious little martyr, that he should have come to this! Did a monstrous elephant come, and crush his darling life out? Give his Missy a pretty kiss, with the great tears rolling on his cheek."

"Well, I wish you'd make half as much fuss about me;" said Fox, with all the self-command that could well be expected. "You haven't even asked me how I am!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon then;" she answered, looking up at him, with the little dog's nose cuddled into her neck, and his short sobs puffing up the golden undergrowth of her darkly-clustering hair. "Yes, to be sure, I should have asked that. It was very forgetful of me. But his poor tail seems to be a little easier now; and the vigour of your step shows how well you have come back to us."

"Well, more than welcome, I am afraid. I can always make allowance for the humours of young ladies; and I know how good and sweet you are. But I think you might have been glad to see me."

"Not when you tread upon my dear dog's tail, and laugh in my face afterwards, instead of being very sorry. I should have begged pardon, if I had been so clumsy as to tread upon a dog of yours."

"Dogs are all very well, in their way; but they have no right to get into our way. This poor little puggie's tail is all right now. Shake hands, Puggie. Why, look! He has forgiven me."

"That shows how wonderfully kind he is, and how little he deserves to be trodden on. But I will not say another word about that; only you might have been

sorrier. Their consciences are so much better than ours. He is licking your hand, as if he had done the wrong. Your sister agreed with me about their nobility. How is darling Christie?"

"Everybody is a darling, except me to-day! Christie is well enough. She always is; except when she goes a cropper out of a trap, and knocks young men's waist-coat-buttons off."

"How coarsely you put it, when you ought to be most thankful to the gentleman who rescued her, when you left her at the mercy of a half-wild horse!"

"I don't know what to make of you to-day, Miss Waldron. Have I done anything to offend you? You are too just and sensible, and—gentle, I should like to say—not to know that you have put an entirely wrong construction upon that little accident with Farrant's old screw. It was Christie's own fault, every bit of it. She thought herself a grand whip, and she came to grief; as girls generally do, when they are bumptious."

"You seem to have a great contempt for girls, Dr. Fox. What have the poor things done to offend you so?"

"Somebody must have been speaking against me. I'd give a trifle to know who it is. I have always been accustomed to reasonable treatment."

"There now, his dear little tail is better! Little *Pixie* loves me so. Little *Pixie* never tells somebody that she is an unreasonable creature. Little *Pixie* is too polite for that."

"Well, I think I had better be off for the day. I have heard of people getting out of bed the wrong side; and you can't make it right all the day, when that has happened. Miss Waldron, I must not go away without

saying that my sister sends you her very best love. I was to be sure to remember that."

"Oh, thank you, Dr. Fox! Your sister is always so very sweet and considerate. And I hope she has also been allowed to send it where it is due, a thousand times as much as here."

"Where can that be? At the rectory, I suppose. Yes, she has not forgotten Mr. Penniloe. She is not at all fickle in her likings."

"Now that is a very fine quality indeed, as well as a very rare one. And another she has, and will not be driven from it; and I own that I quite agree with her. She does not look down upon other people, and think that they belong to another world, because they are not so well off in this one as she is. A gentleman is a gentleman, in her judgment, and is not to be cast by, after many kind acts, merely because he is not made of money."

"Ah, now I see what all this comes to!" exclaimed Fox, smiling pleasantly. "Well, I am quite open to a little reasoning there, because the whole thing is so ridiculous. Now put it to yourself; how would you like to be a sort of son-in-law to good Mother Gilham's green coal-scuttle? A coal-scuttle should make one grateful, you will say. Hear, hear! not at all a bad pun that; though quite involuntary."

"The bonnet may be behind the age, or in front of it, I know not which;" said Nicie, very resolute to show no smile; "but a better and sweeter old face never looked——"

"A better horse never looked out of a bridle. It is bridle, and blinkers, and saddle, all in one."

"It is quite useless trying to make me laugh." Her voice however belied her; and *Pixie* watching her face began to wag the wounded tail again. "Your sister, who knows what bonnets are, to which you can have no pretension, is well acquainted with the sterling value——"

"Oh come, I am sure it would not fetch much now, though it may have cost two guineas, or more, in the days before 'my son Frank' was born."

"Really, Jemmy, you are too bad, when I want to talk seriously."

"So long as I am 'Jemmy' once more, I don't care how bad I am."

"That was a slip. But you must listen to me. I will not be laughed off from saying what I think. Do you suppose that it is a joking matter for poor Frank Gilham?"

"I don't care a copper for his state of mind, if Chris is not fool enough to share it. The stupid fellow came to me this morning, and instead of trying to smoothe me down, what does he do but blow me up sky-high! You should have heard him. He never swore at all, but gave utterance to the noblest sentiments—just because they were in his favour."

"Then I admire him for it. It was very manly of him. Why were all large ideas in his favour? Just because the small ones are on your side. I suppose, you pretend to care for me?"

"No pretence about it. All too true. And this is what I get done to me?"

"But how would you like my brother to come and say—'I disapprove of Dr. Fox. I forbid you to say

another word to him'? Would you recognise his fraternal right in the matter, and go away quietly?"

"Hardly that. I should leave it to you. And if you held by me, I should snap my fingers at him."

"Of course you would. And so would anybody else; Frank Gilham among the number. And your sister—is she to have no voice, because you are a roaring lion? Surely her parents, and not her brother, should bar the way, if it must be barred. Just think of yourself, and ask yourself how your own law would fit you."

"The cases are very different, and you know it as well as I do. Frank Gilham is quite a poor man; and, although he is not a bad kind of fellow, his position in the world is not the same as ours."

"That may be so. But if Christie loves him, and is quite content with his position in the world, and puts up with the coal-scuttle—as you call it—and he is a good man and true, and a gentleman, are they both to be miserable, to please you? And more than that—you don't know Christie. If Frank Gilham shows proper courage, and is not afraid of mean imputations, no one will ask your leave, I think."

"Well, I shall have done my best; and if I cannot stop it, let them rue the day. Her father and mother would never allow it; and as I am responsible for the whole affair, and cannot consult them, as things are now, I am bound to act in their place, I think. But never mind that. One may argue for ever, and a girl in a moment can turn the tables on the cleverest man alive. Let us come back to our own affairs. I have

some news which ought to please you. By rare good luck I have hit upon the very two men who were employed upon that awful business. I shall have them soon, and then we shall know all about this most mysterious case. By George, it shall go hard indeed with the miscreant who plotted it."

"Oh don't—oh don't! What good can it be?" cried Nicie, trembling, and stammering. "It will kill my mother; I am sure it will. I implore you not to go on with it."

"What!" exclaimed Fox with amazement. "You to ask me, you his only daughter, to let it be so—to hush up the matter—to submit to this atrocious wrong! And your father—it is the last thing I ever should have thought to hear."

In shame and terror she could not speak, but quailed before his indignant gaze, and turned away from him with a deep low sob.

"My darling, my innocent dear," he cried in alarm at her bitter anguish; "give me your hand; let me look at your face. I know that no power on earth would make you do a thing that you saw to be shameful. I beg your pardon humbly, if I spoke too harshly. You know that I would not vex you, Inez, and beyond any doubt you can explain this strange—this inconceivable thing. You are sure to have some good reason for it."

"Yes, you would say so if you knew all. But not now—I dare not; it is too dreadful. It is not for myself. If I had my own way—but what use? I dare not even tell you that. For the present, at least for the present, do nothing. If you care about me at all, I beg you not to do what would never be forgiven. And my

mother is in such a miserable state, so delicate, so frail, and helpless! Do for my sake, do show this once, that you have some affection for me."

Nicie put her soft hand on his shoulder, and pleaded her cause with no more words, but a gaze of such tenderness and sweet faith, that he could not resist it. Especially as he saw his way to reassure her, without departing from the plan he had resolved upon.

"I will do anything, my pretty dove," he said with a noble surrender; "to relieve your precious and trustful heart. I will even do this, if it satisfies you—I will take no steps for another month, an entire month from this present time. I cannot promise more than that, now can I, for any bewitchment? And in return, you must pledge yourself to give your mother not even a hint of what I have just told you. It would only make her anxious, which would be very bad for her health, poor thing; and she has not the faith in me that you have. She must not even dream that I have heard of those two villains."

This was a bright afterthought of his; for if Lady Waldron should know of his discovery, she might contrive to inform them that he had his eye upon them.

"Oh, how good you are!" cried Nicie. "I can never thank you enough, dear Jemmy; and it must appear so cruel of me, to ask you to forego so long the chance of shaming those low people, who have dared to belie you so."

"What is a month, compared to you?" Jemmy asked, with real greatness. "But if you feel any obligation, you know how to reward me, dear."

Nicie looked at him, with critical eyes; and then as

if reckless of anything small, flung both arms round his neck, and kissed him.

“Oh it is so kind, so kind of him!” she declared to herself, to excuse herself; while he thought it was very kind of her. And she, being timid of her own affection, loved him all the more for not encroaching on it.

Jemmy rode away in a happy frame of mind. He loved that beautiful maiden, and he was assured of her love for him. He knew that she was far above him, in the gifts of nature, and the bloom that beautifies them—the bloom that is not of the cheeks alone, but of the gentle dew of kindness, and the pearl of innocence. Fox felt a little ashamed of himself, for a trifle of sharp practice; but his reason soon persuaded him that his conscience was too ticklish. And that is a thing to be stopped at once.

While jogging along in this condition, on the road towards Pumpington, he fell in with another horseman less inclined to cheerfulness. This was Farmer Stephen Horner, a younger brother of Farmer John, a less substantial, and therefore perhaps more captious agriculturist. He was riding a very clever cob, and looked both clever and smart himself, in his bottle-green cutaway coat, red waistcoat, white cord breeches and hard brown hat. Striking into the turnpike road from a grass-track skirting the Beacon Hill, he hailed the Doctor, and rode beside him.

“Heard the news, have ’e?” asked Farmer Steve, as his fat calves creaked against the saddle-flaps within a few inches of Jemmy’s, and their horses kept step, like a dealer’s pair. “But there—come to think

of it, I be a fool for asking, and you always along of Passon so?"

"Only came home yesterday. Haven't seen him yet," the Doctor answered briskly. "Haven't heard anything particular. Nothing the matter with him, I hope?"

"Not him, sir, so much as what he've taken up. Hath made up his mind, so people say, to abolish our old Fair to Perlycross." Farmer Steve watched the Doctor's face. He held his own opinion, but he liked to know the other's first. Moreover he owed him a little bill.

"But surely he cannot do that;" said Fox, who cared not a jot about the fair, but thought of his own concern with it. "Why, it was granted by charter, I believe, hundreds of years ago; when Perlycross was a much larger place, and the main road to London passed through it, as the pack-saddle teams do still sometimes."

"So it were, sir, so it were. Many's the time when I were a boy, I have read of Magner Charter, and the time as they starved the King in the island, afore the old yew-tree come on our old tower. But my brother John, he reckoneth as he knoweth everything; and he saith our market-place belongeth to the Dean and Chapter, and Fair was granted to Church, he saith, and so Church can abolish it. But I can't see no sense in that. Why, it be outside of Church railings altogether. Now you are a learned man, Doctor Fox. And if you'll give me your opinion, I can promise 'e, it shan't go no further."

"The plain truth is," replied Jemmy, knowing well

that if his opinion went against the Parson, it would be all over the parish by supper-time, "I have never gone into the subject, and I know nothing whatever about it. But we all know the Fair has come down to nothing now. There has not been a beast there for the last three years, and nothing but a score of pigs, and one pen of sheep last year. It has come to be nothing but a pleasure-fair, with a little show of wrestling, and some singlestick play, followed by a big bout of drinking. Still I should have thought there would be at least a twelvemonth's notice, and a public proclamation."

"So say I, sir; and the very same words I used to my brother John, last night. John Horner is getting a'most too big, with his Churchwarden, and his hundred pounds, he had better a' kept for his family. Let 'un find out who have robbed his own Churchyard, afore 'a singeth out again' a poor man's glass of ale. I don't hold with John in all things; though a' hath key pianner for's dafters, and addeth field to field, same as rich man in the Bible laid up treasure for his soul this night. I tell you what, Doctor, and you may tell John Horner—I likes old things, for being old; though there may be more bad than good in them. What harm, if a few chaps do get drunk, and the quarrelsome folks has their heads cracked? They'd only go and do it somewhere else, if they was stopped of our place. Passon be a good man as ever lived, and wonnerful kind to the poor folk. But a' beginneth to have his way too much; and all along of my brother John. To tell you the truth, Doctor, I couldn't bear the job about that old tombstone, to memory of Squire Jan Toms, and a fine piece of poetry it were too. Leap-frogged it, hundreds

and hundreds of times, when I were a boy, I have; and so has my father and grandfather afore; and why not my sons, and my grandsons too, when perhaps my own standeth 'longside of 'un? I won't believe a word of it, but what thic old ancient stone were smashed up a' purpose, by order of Passon Penniloe. Tell 'e what, Doctor, thic there channging of every mortal thing, just for the sake of channging, bain't the right way for to fetch folks to church; 'cordin' at least to my mind. Why do us go to church? Why, because can't help it; 'long of wives and children, when they comes, and lookin' out for 'un, when the children was ourselves. Turn the bottom up, sir, and what be that but custom, same as one generation requireth from another? And to put new patches on it, and be proud of them, is the same thing as tinker did to wife's ham-boiler—drowed the rivets out, and made 'un leak worse than ever. Not another shilling will they patchers get from me."

Farmer Steve sat down in his saddle, and his red waistcoat settled down upon the pommel. His sturdy cob also laid down his ears, and stubborn British sentiment was in every line of both of them.

"Well, I won't pretend to say about the other matters;" said Fox, who as an Englishman could allow for obstinacy. "But, Farmer, I am sure that you are wrong about the tombstone. Parson did not like it, and no wonder. But he is not the man to do things crookedly. He would have moved it openly, or not at all. It was quite as much an accident, as if your horse put his foot upon a nut and cracked it."

"Well, sir, well, sir, we has our own opinions. Oh,

you have paid the pike for me! Thank 'e, Doctor. I'll pay yours, next time we come this way together."

The story of the tombstone was simply this. John Toms, a rollicking Cavalier of ancient Devonshire lineage, had lived and died at Perlycross, nearly two centuries ago. His grave was towards the great southern porch, and there stood his headstone large and bold, confronting the faithful at a corner where two causeways met. Thus every worshipper, who entered the House of Prayer by its main approach, was invited to reflect upon the fine qualities of this gentleman, as recorded in large letters. To a devout mind this might do no harm; but all Perlycross was not devout, and many a light thought was suggested, or perhaps an untimely smile produced, by this too sprightly memorial. "A spirited epitaph that, sir," was the frequent remark of visitors. "But scarcely conceived in a proper spirit," was the Parson's general reply.

The hideous western gallery, the parish revel called the Fair, and this unseemly tombstone, had been sore tribulations to the placid mind of Penniloe; and yet he durst not touch that stone, sacred not to memory only, but to vested rights, and living vein of local sentiment. However the fates were merciful.

"Very, sad accident this morning, sir. I do hope you will try to forgive us, Mr. Penniloe," said Robson Adney, the manager of the works, one fine October morning, and he said it with a stealthy wink; "seven of our chaps have let our biggest scaffold-pole, that red one, with a butt as big as a milestone, roll off their clumsy shoulders, and it has smashed poor Squire Toms' old tombstone into a thousand pieces. Never

read a word of it again, sir—such a sad loss to the churchyard! But quite an accident, sir, you know; purely a casual accident.”

The Curate looked at him, but he “smiled none”—as another tombstone still expresses it; and if charity compelled Mr. Penniloe to believe him, gratitude enforced another view; for Adney well knew his dislike of that stone, and was always so eager to please him.

But that every one who so desires may judge for himself, whether Farmer Steve was right, or Parson Penniloe, here are the well-remembered lines that formed the preface to Divine worship in the parish of Perlycross.

“ ‘Halloa! who lieth here?’

‘I, old Squire Jan Toms.’

‘What dost lack?’ ‘A tun of beer,
For a tippie with them fantoms.’ ”

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCHOOLMASTER ABROAD.

“Boys, here’s a noise!”

Sergeant Jakes strode up and down the long school-room on Friday morning, flapping his empty sleeve, and swinging that big cane with the tuberous joints, whose taste was none too saccharine. That well-known ejaculation, so expressive of stern astonishment, had for the moment its due effect. Curly heads were jerked back, elbows squared, sniggers were hushed, the munch of apples (which had been as of milching kine) stuck fast, or was shunted into bulging cheek; never a boy seemed capable of dreaming that there was any other boy in the world besides himself. Scratch of pens, and grunts of mental labour, were the only sounds in

this culmination of literature, known as "Copy-exercise." As Achilles, though reduced to a ghost, took a longer stride at the prowess of his son; and as deep joys, on a similar occasion, pervaded Latona's silent breast; even so High-Jarks sucked the top of his cane, and felt that he had not lived in vain. There are many men still hearty—though it is so long ago—who have led a finer life, through that man's higher culture.

But presently—such is the nature of human nature, in its crude probation—the effect of that noble remonstrance waned. Silence (which is itself a shadow, cast by death upon life perhaps) began to flicker—as all dulness should—with the play of small ideas moving it. Little timid whispers, a cane's length below the breath, and with the heart shuffling out of all participation; and then a tacit grin that was afraid to move the molars, and then a cock of eye, that was intended to involve (when a bigger eye was turned away) its mighty owner; and then a clink of marbles in a pocket down the leg; and then a downright joke, of such very subtle humour, that it stole along the bench through funnel'd hands; and then alas, a small boy of suicidal levity sputtered out a laugh, which made wiser wigs stand up!

His crime was only deepened by ending in sham cough; and sad to say, the very boy who had made the fatal joke (instead of being grateful for reckless approbation) stood up and pointed an unmanly finger at him. The Sergeant's keen eye was upon them both; and a tremble ran along the oak, that bore many tempting aptitudes for the vindication of ethics. But the Sergeant bode his time. His sense of justice was chivalrous. Let the big boy make another joke.

"Boys, here's a noise, again!"

Those who have not had the privilege of the Sergeant's lofty discipline can never understand—far less convey—the significance of his second shout. It expressed profound amazement, horror at our fallen state, incredulity of his own ears, promptitude to redress the wrong, and yet a pathetic sorrow at the impending grim necessity. The boys knew well that his second protest never ascended to heaven in vain; and the owners of tender quarters shrank, and made ready to slide beneath the protection of their bench. Other boys, with thick corduroys, quailed for the moment, and closed their mouths; but what mouth was ever closed permanently, by the opening of another?

"Now you shall have it, boys," the Sergeant thundered, as the uproar waxed beyond power of words. "Any boy slipping out of stroke shall have double cuts for cowardice. Stop the ends up. All along both rows of benches; I am coming, I am coming!"

"Oh sir, please sir, 'twadn' me, sir! 'Twor all along o' Bill Cornish, sir."

He had got this trimmer by the collar, and his cane swung high in air, when the door was opened vigorously, and a brilliant form appeared. Brilliant, less by its own merits, than by brave embellishment, as behoves a youth ascending stairs of state from page to footman, and mounting upward, ever upward, to the vinous heights of Butlerhood. For this was Bob Cornish, Bill's elder brother; and he smiled at the terrors of the hurtling cane, compulsive but a year ago, of tears.

With a dignity already imbibed from Binstock, this

young man took off his hat, and employing a spare slate as a tray, presented a letter with a graceful bow. He was none too soon, but just in time. The weapon of outraged law came down, too lightly to dust a jacket; and the smiter, wonder-smitten, went to a desk, and read as follows.

"Lady Waldron will be much obliged if Sergeant Jakes will come immediately in the vehicle sent with the bearer of this letter. Let no engagement forbid this. Mr. Penniloe has kindly consented to it."

The roof resounded with shouts of joy, instead of heavy wailing, as the Sergeant at once dismissed the school; and in half an hour he entered the business-room at Walderscourt, and there found the lady of the house, looking very resolute, and accompanied by her daughter.

"Soldier Jakes will take a chair. See that the door is closed, my child, and no persons lingering near it. Now, Inez, will you say to this brave soldier of your father's regiment, what we desire him to undertake, if he will be so faithful; for the benefit of his Colonel's family; also for the credit of this English country."

This was clever of my lady. She knew that the veteran's liking was not particularly active for herself, or any of the Spanish nation; but that he had transferred his love and fealty of so many years, to his Officer's gentle daughter. Any request from Nicie would be almost as sacred a command to him, as if it had come from her father. He stood up, made a low bow followed by a military salute, and gazed at the sweet face he loved so well.

"It is for my dear father's sake; and I am as sure as he himself would be," Miss Waldron spoke with tears in her eyes, and a sad smile on her lips that would have moved a heart much harder than this veteran's, "that you will not refuse to do us a great, a very great service, if you can. And we have nobody we can trust like you; because you are so true, and brave."

The Sergeant rose again, and made another bow even deeper than the former one; but instead of touching his grizzled locks he laid his one hand on his heart; and although by no means a gushing man, he found it impossible to prevent a little gleam, like the upshot of a well, quivering under his ferny brows.

"We would not ask you even so," continued Nicie, with a grateful glance, "if it were not that you know the place, and perhaps may find some people there still living to remember you. When my father lay wounded at the house of my grandfather, and was in great danger of his life, you, being also disabled for a time, were allowed at his request to remain with him, and help him. Will you go to that place again, to do us a service no one else can do?"

"To the end of the world, Miss, without asking why. But the Lord have mercy on all them boys! Whatever will they do without me?"

"We will arrange about all that, with Mr. Penniloe's consent. If that can be managed, will you go, at once, and at any inconvenience to yourself?"

"No ill-convenience shall stop me, Miss. If I thought of that twice, I should be a deserter, afore the

lines of the enemy. To be of the least bit of use to you, is an honour as well as a duty to me."

"I thought that you would; I was sure that you would." Inez gave a glance of triumph at her less trustful mother. "And what makes us hurry you so, is the chance that has suddenly offered for your passage. We heard this morning, by an accident almost, that a ship is to sail from Topsham to-morrow, bound direct for Cadiz. Not a large ship, but a fast-sailing vessel—a schooner I think they call it, and the Captain is one of Binstock's brothers. You would get there in half the time it would take to go to London, and wait about for passage, and then come all down the Channel. And from Cadiz you can easily get on. You know a little Spanish, don't you?"

"Not reg'lar, Miss. But it will come back again. I picked up just enough for this—I couldn't understand them much; but I could make them look as if they understood me."

"That is quite sufficient. You will have letters to three or four persons who are settled there, old servants of my grandfather. We cannot tell which of them may be alive, but may well hope that some of them are so. The old house is gone, I must tell you that. After all the troubles of the war, there was not enough left to keep it up with."

"That grand old house, Miss, with the pillars, and the carrots, and the arches, the same as in a picture! And everybody welcome; and you never knew if there was fifty, or a hundred in it——"

"Sergeant, you describe it well;" Lady Waldron interrupted. "There are no such mansions in this country.

Alas, it is gone from us for ever, because we loved our native land too well!"

"Not only that," said the truthful Inez; "but also because the young Count, as you would call him, has wasted the relics of his patrimony. And now I will explain to you the reasons for our asking this great service of you."

The veteran listened with close attention, and no small astonishment, to the young lady's clear account of that great public lottery, and the gorgeous prize accruing on the death of Sir Thomas Waldron. This was enough to tempt a ruined man to desperate measures; and Jakes had some knowledge in early days of the young Count's headstrong character. But if it should prove so, if he were guilty of the crime which had caused so much distress and such prolonged unhappiness, yet his sister could not bear that the sordid motive should be disclosed, at least in this part of the world. For the sake of others, it would be needful to denounce the culprit; but if the detection were managed well, no motive need be assigned at all. Let every one form his own conclusion. Spanish papers, and Spanish news, came very sparingly to Devonshire; and the English public would be sure (in ignorance of that financial scheme, whose result supplied the temptation) to ascribe the assault upon Protestant rites to Popish contempt and bigotry.

"I should tell the whole, if I had to decide it;" said Nicie with the candour and simplicity of youth. "If he has done it, for the sake of nasty money, let everybody know what he has done it for."

But the Sergeant shook his head, and quite agreed

with Lady Waldron. The world was quite quick enough at bad constructions, without receiving them ready-made.

"Leave busy-bodies to do their own buzzing;" was his oracular suggestion. "'Tis a grand old family, even on your mother's side, Miss;" Nicie smiled a little, as her mother stared at this new comparative estimate. "And what odds to our clodhoppers what they do? A Don don't look at things the same as a dung-carter; and it takes a man who knows the world to make allowance for him. The Count may have done it, mind. I won't say no, until such time as I can prove it. But after all, 'tis comforting to think that it was so, compared to what we all was afraid of. Why, the dear old Colonel would be as happy as a King, in the place he was so nigh going to after the battle of Barosa; looking down over the winding of the river, and the moon among the orange-trees, where he was a' making love!"

"Hush!" whispered Nicie, as her mother turned away, with a trembling in her throat; and the old man saw that the memory of the brighter days had brought the shadows also.

"Saturday to-morrow. Boys will do very well, till Monday;" he came out with this abruptly, to cover his confusion. "By that time, please God, I shall be in the Bay of Biscay. This is what I'll do, Miss, if it suits you and my lady. I'll come again to-night at nine o'clock, with my kit slung tidy, and not a word to anybody. Then I can have the letters, Miss, and my last orders. Ship sails at noon to-morrow, name of *Montilla*. Mail-coach to Exeter passes White Post, a little after half-past ten to-night. Be aboard easily,

afore daylight. No, Miss, thank you, I shan't want no money. Passage paid to and fro. Old soldier always hath a shot in the locker."

"As if we should let you go, like that! You shall not go at all, unless you take this purse."

That evening he received his last instructions, and the next day he sailed in the schooner *Montilla*.

Even after the many strange events, which had by this time caused such a whirl of giddiness in Perlycross, that if there had been a good crack across the street, every man and woman would have fallen headlong into it; and even before there had been leisure for people to try to tell them anyhow, to one another—much less discuss them at all as they deserved—this sudden break-up of the school, and disappearance of High Jarks, would have been absolutely beyond belief, if there had not been scores of boys, too loudly in evidence everywhere. But when a chap, about four feet high, came scudding in at any door that was open, and kicking at it if it dared to be shut, and then went trying every cupboard-lock, and making sad eyes at his mother if the key was out; and then again, when he was stuffed to his buttons—which he would be, as sure as eggs are eggs—if the street went howling with his playful ways, and every corner was in a jerk with him, and no elderly lady could go along without her umbrella in front of her—how was it possible for any mother not to feel herself guilty of more harm than good?

In a word, "High Jarks" was justified (as all wisdom is) of his children; and the weak-minded women, who had complained that he smote too hard, were the

first to find fault with the feeble measures of his substitute, Vickary Toogood of Honiton. This gentleman came into office on Monday, smiling in a very superior manner at his predecessor's arrangements.

"I think we may lock up that," he said, pointing to the Sergeant's little tickler; "we must be unworthy of our vocation, if we cannot dispense with such primitive tools." A burst of applause thrilled every bench; but knowing the boys of his parish so well, Mr. Penniloe shook his head with dubious delight.

And truly before the week was out, many a time would he murmur sadly—"Oh, for one hour of the Sergeant!" as he heard the Babel of tongues outside, and entering saw the sprawling elbows, slouching shoulders, and hands in pockets, which the "Apostle of Moral force"—*Moral farce* was its sound and meaning here—permitted as the attitude of pupilage.

"Sim'th I be quite out in my reckoning;" old Channing the Clerk had the cheek to say, as he met the Parson outside the school-door; "didn't know it were Whit-Monday yet."

Mr. Penniloe smiled, but without rejoicing; he understood the reference too well. Upon Whit-Monday the two rival Benefit-clubs of the village held their feast, and did their very utmost from bridge to Abbey, to out-drum, out-fife, and out-trumpet one another. Neither in his house was his conscience left untouched.

"I think Lady Waldron might have sent us a better man than that is;" Mrs. Muggridge observed one afternoon, when the uproar came across the road, and pierced the rectory windows. "I am not sure but what little Master Mike could keep better order than that is."

Why, the beating of the bounds was nothing to it. What could you be about, sir, to take such a man as that?" Thyatira had long established full privilege of censure.

"Certainly there is a noise;" the Curate was always candid. "But he brought the very highest credentials from the Institute. We have scarcely given him fair trial yet. The system is new, you see, Mrs. Muggridge; and it must be allowed some time to take effect. No physical force, the moral sense appealed to, the higher qualities educed by kindness, the innate preference of right promoted and strengthened by self-exertion, the juvenile faculties to be elevated, from the moment of earliest development, by a perception of their high responsibility, and, and—well I really forget the rest, but you perceive that it amounts to——"

"Row, and riot, and roaring rubbish. That's what it amounts to, sir. But I beg your pardon, sir; excuse my boldness, for speaking out, upon things so far above me. But when they comes across the road, at ten o'clock in the morning, to beg for a lump of raw beefsteak, by reason of two boys getting four black eyes, in fighting across the Master's desk, the new system seem not Apostolical. An Apostle, about as much as I am! My father was above me, and had gifts, and he put himself back, when not understood, to the rising generation; but he never would demean himself, to send for raw beefsteak for their black eyes."

"And I think he would have shown his common sense in that. What did you do, my good Thyatira?" Mr. Penniloe had a little spice of mischief in him, which always accompanies a sub-sense of humour.

"This was what I did, sir. I looked at him, and he seemed to have been in the wars himself, and to have come across, perhaps to get out of them, being one of the clever ones, as true Schoolmaster sayeth, and by the same token not so thick of head; and he looked up at me, as if he was proud of it, to take me in; while the real fighting boys look down, as I know by my brother who was guilty of it; and I said to him, very quiet like—'No steak kept here for moral-force black-eyes-boys. You go to Robert Jakes, the brother of a man that understands his business, and tell him to enter in his books, half a pound prime-cut, for four black eyes, to the credit of Vickary Toogood.'"

It was not only thus, but in many other ways, that the village at large shed painful tears (sadly warranted by the ears), and the Church looked with scorn at the children straggling in, like a lot of Dissenters going anyhow; and the Cross at the meeting of the four main roads, which had been a fine stump for centuries, lost its proper coat of whitewash on Candlemas-day; and the crystal Perle itself began to be threaded with red from pugnacious noses. For the lesson of all history was repeated, that softness universal, and unlimited concession, set off very grandly, but come home with broken heads, to load their guns with grapnel.

And what could Mr. Penniloe do, when some of the worst belligerents were those of his own household; upon one frontier his three pupils, and upon another, Zip Tremlett? Pike, Peckover, and Mopuss, the pupils now come back again, were all very decent and law-abiding fellows, but had drifted into a savage feud with the factory boys at the bottom of the village. As they

were but three against three score, it soon became unsafe for them to cross Perlebridge, without securing their line of retreat. Of course they looked down from a lofty height upon "cads who smelled of yarn, and even worse;" but what could moral, or even lineal excellence, avail them against the huge disparity of numbers? Each of them held himself a match for any three of the enemy, and they issued a challenge upon that scale; but the paper-cap'd host showed no chivalry. On one occasion, this noble trio held the bridge victoriously against the whole force of the enemy, inflicting serious loss, and even preparing for a charge upon the mass. But the cowardly mass found a heap of road-metal, and in lack of their own filled the air with it, and the Pennilovian heroes had begun to bite the dust, when luckily Farmer John rode up, and saved the little force from annihilation by slashing right and left through the Operative phalanx.

When Mr. Penniloe heard of this pitched battle, he was deeply grieved; and sending for his pupils administered a severe rebuke to them. But John Pike's reply was a puzzler to him.

"If you please, sir, will you tell us what to do, when they fall upon us?"

"Endeavour to avoid them;" replied the Clergyman, feeling some want of confidence however in his counsel.

"So we do, sir, all we can;" Pike made answer, with the aspect of a dove. "But they won't be avoided, when they think they've got enough cads together to lick us."

"I should like to know one thing," enquired the

Hopper, striking out his calves, which were now becoming of commanding size; "are we to be called 'Latin tay-kettles,' and 'Parson's pups,' and then do nothing but run away?"

"My father says that the road is called the King's Highway;" said Mopuss, who was a fat boy, with great deliberation, "because all his subjects have a right to it, but no right to throw it at one another."

"I admit that a difficulty arises there;" replied Mr. Penniloe as gravely as he could, for Mopuss was always quoting his papa, a lawyer of some eminence. "But really, my lads, we must not have any more of this. There is fault upon both sides, beyond all doubt. I shall see the factory manager to-morrow, and get him to warn his pugnacious band. I am very unwilling to confine you to these premises; but if I hear of any more pitched battles, I shall be compelled to do so, until peace has been proclaimed."

Here again was Jakes to seek; for the fear of him lay upon the factory boys, as heavily as upon his own school-children. And perhaps as sore a point as any was that he should have been rapt away, without full reason rendered.

CHAPTER X.

LOYALTY.

"I do not consider myself at all an inquisitive man," Mr. Penniloe reflected, and here the truth was with him; "nevertheless it is hard upon me to be refused almost the right to speculate upon this question. They have told me that it is of the last importance, to secure this

great disciplinarian—never appreciated while with us, but now deplored so deeply—for a special service in the south of Spain. What that special service is, I am not to know, until his return; possibly not even then. And Mr. Webber has no idea what the meaning of it is. But I know that it has much to do—all to do, I might even say—with that frightful outrage of last November—three months ago, alas, alas, and a sad disgrace upon this parish still! Marvellous are the visitations of the Lord. Practically speaking, we know but little more of that affair now, than on the day it was discovered. If it were not for one thing, I should even be driven at last to Gowler's black conclusion; and my faith in the true love of a woman, and in the honesty of a proud brave woman would be shattered, and leave me miserable. But now it is evident that good and gentle Nicie is acting entirely with her mother; and to imagine that she would wrong her father is impossible. Perhaps I shall even get friend Gowler's hundred pounds. What a triumph that would be! To obtain a large sum for the Service of God from an avowed—ah well, who am I to think harshly of him? But the money might even be blest to himself; which is the first thing to consider. It is my duty to accept it therefore, if I can only get it.

“And here again is Jemmy Fox, not behaving at all as he used to do. Concealing something from me—I am almost sure of it by his manner—and discussing it, I do believe, with Gronow—an intimacy that cannot be good for him. I wish I could perceive more clearly, in what points I have neglected my duty to the parish; for I seem to be losing hold upon it, which must be entirely my own fault. There must be some want of judgment

somewhere—what else could lead to such very sad fighting? Even Zip, a little girl, disgracing us by fighting in the streets! That at any rate I can stop, and will do so pretty speedily.”

This was a lucky thought for him, because it led to action, instead of brooding, into which miserable condition he might otherwise have dropped. And when a man too keen of conscience hauls himself across the coals, the Governor of a hot place takes advantage to peep up between them. Mr. Penniloe rang the bell, and begged Mrs. Muggridge to be good enough to send Miss Zippy to him.

Zip, who had grown at least two inches since the death of her grandmother—not in length perhaps so much as in the height she made of it—came shyly into the dusky book-room, with one of her long hands crumpling the lower corner of her pinafore into her great brown eyes. She knew she was going to catch it, and knew also the way to meet it, for she opened the conversation with a long-drawn sob.

“Don’t be frightened, my dear child;” said the Parson with the worst of his intention waning. “I am not going to scold you much, my dear.”

“Oh, I was so terrible afraid, you was.” The little girl crept up close to him, and began to play with his buttonhole, curving her lissome fingers in and out, like rosebuds in a trellis, and looking down at the teardrops on her pinny. “Plaise sir, I knows well enough as I desarves a bit of it.”

“Then why did you do it, my dear child? But I am glad that you feel it to be wrong.”

The clergyman was sitting in the deep square chair,

where most of his sermons came to him, and he brought his calm face down a little, to catch the expression of the young thing's eyes. Suddenly she threw herself into his arms, and kissed his lips, and cheeks, and forehead, and stroked his silvery hair, and burst into a passionate wail; and then slid down upon a footstool, and nursed his foot.

"Do 'e know why I done that?" she whispered, looking up over his knees at him. "Because there be nobody like 'e, in the heavens, or the earth, or the waters under the earth. Her may be as jealous as ever her plaiseth; but I tell 'e, I don't care a cuss."

"My dear little impetuous creature," Mr. Penniloe knew that his darling Fay was the one defied thus recklessly; "I am sure that you are fond of all of us. And to please me, as well as for much higher reasons, you must never use bad words. Bad deeds too I have heard of, Zip, though I am not going to scold much now. But why did you get into conflict with a boy?"

Zip pondered the meaning of these words for a moment, and then her conscience interpreted.

"Because he spoke bad of 'e, about the Fair." She crooked her quick fingers together as she spoke, and tore them asunder with vehemence.

"And what did you do to him? Eh Zip? Oh Zip!"

"Nort, for to sarve 'un out, as a' desarved. Only pulled most of 's hair out. His mooother hurned arter me; but I got inside the ge-at."

"A nice use indeed for my premises—to make them a refuge, after committing assault and battery! Well, what shall we come to next?"

"Plaise sir, I want to tell 'e zummut;" said the

child, looking up very earnestly. "Bain't it Perlycrass Fair, come Tuesday next?"

"I am sorry to say that it is. A day of sad noise and uproar. Remember that little Zip must not go outside the gates, that day."

"Nor Passon nayther;" the child took hold of his hand, as if she were pulling him inside the gate, for her nature was full of gestures; and then she gazed at him with a sage smile of triumph—"and Passon mustn't go nayther."

Mr. Penniloe took little heed of this (though he had to think of it afterwards) but sent the child to have her tea, with Muggridge and the children.

But before he could set to his work in earnest, although he had discovered much to do, in came his own child, little Fay, looking round the room indignantly. With her ladylike style, she was much too grand to admit a suspicion of jealousy, but she smoothed her golden hair gently back, and just condescended to glance round the chairs. Mr. Penniloe said nothing, and feigned to see nothing, though getting a little afraid in his heart; for he always looked on Fay as representing her dear mother. He knew that the true way to learn a child's sentiments, is to let them come out of their own accord. There is nothing more jealous than a child, except a dog.

"Oh, I thought Darkie was here again!" said Fay, throwing back her shoulders, and spinning on one leg. "This room belongs to Darkie now altogether. Though I can't see what right she has to it."

Mr. Penniloe treated this soliloquy, as if he had not

heard it; and went on with his work, as if he had no time to attend to children's affairs just now.

"It may be right, or it may be wrong," said Fay, addressing the room in general, and using a phrase she had caught up from Pike, a very great favourite of hers; "but I can't see why all the people of this house should have to make way for a Gipsy."

This was a little too much for a father and clergyman to put up with. "Fay!" said Mr. Penniloe in a voice that made her tremble; and she came and stood before him, contrite and sobbing, with her head down, and both hands behind her back. Without raising her eyes the fair child listened, while her father spoke impressively; and then with a reckless look, she tendered full confession.

"Father, I know that I am very wicked, and I seem to get worse every day. I wish I was the Devil altogether; because then I could not get any worse."

"My little child," said her father with amazement; "I can scarcely believe my ears. My gentle little Fay to use such words!"

"Oh, *she* thinks nothing of saying that! And you know how fond you are of her, papa. I thought it might make you fond of me."

"This must be seen to at once," thought Mr. Penniloe, when he had sent his jealous little pet away; "but what can I do with that poor deserted child? Passionate, loving, very strong-willed, grateful, fearless, sensitive, inclined to be contemptuous, wonderfully quick at learning, she has all the elements of a very noble woman—or of a very pitiable wreck. Quite unfit to be with my children, as my better judgment pronounced at first.

She ought to be under a religious, large-minded, firm, but gentle woman—a lady too, or she would laugh at her. Though she speaks broad Devonshire dialect herself, she detects in a moment the mistakes of others, and she has a lofty contempt for vulgarity. She is thrown by the will of God upon my hands, and I should be a coward, or a heartless wretch, if I shirked the responsibility. It will almost break her heart to go from me; but go she must for her own sake, as well as that of my little ones.”

“How are you, sir?” cried a cheerful voice. “I fear that I interrupt you. But I knocked three or four times, and got no answer. Excuse my coming in like this. Can I have a little talk with you?”

“Certainly, Dr. Fox. I beg your pardon; but my mind was running upon difficult questions. Let us have the candles, and then I am at your service.”

“Now,” said Jemmy when they were alone again; “I dare say you think that I have behaved very badly, in keeping out of your way so long.”

“Not badly, but strangely;” replied the Parson, who never departed from the truth, even for the sake of politeness. “I concluded that there must be some reason; knowing that I had done nothing to cause it.”

“I should rather think not. Nothing ever changes you. But it was for your sake. And now I will enlighten you, as the time is so close at hand. It appears that you have not succeeded in abolishing the Fair.”

“Not for this year. There were various formalities. But this will be the last of those revels, I believe. The proclamation will be read on Tuesday morning. After

this year, I hope, no more carousals prolonged far into the Penitential day. It will take them by surprise; but it is better so. Otherwise there would have been preparations for a revel more reckless, as being the last."

"I suppose you know, sir, what bitter offence you are giving to hundreds of people all around?"

"I am sorry that it should be so. But it is my simple duty."

"Nothing ever stops you from your duty. But I hope you will do your duty to yourself and us, by remaining upon your own premises that day."

"Certainly not. If I did such a thing, I should seem to be frightened of my own act. Please God, I shall be in the market-place, to hear the proclamation read, and attend to my parish-work afterwards."

"I know that it is useless to argue with you, sir. None of our people would dare to insult you; but one cannot be sure of outsiders. At any rate, do keep near the village, where there are plenty to defend you."

"No one will touch me. I am not a hero; and I can't afford to get my new hat damaged. I shall remain among the civilised, unless I am called away."

"Well, that is something; though not all that I could wish. And now I will tell you why I am glad, much as I dislike the Fair, that for this year at least it is to be. It is a most important date to me, and I hope it will bring you some satisfaction also. Unless we manage very badly indeed, or have desperately bad luck, we shall get hold of the villains who profaned your churchyard, and through them of course find the instigator."

With this preface, Fox told his tale to Mr. Penniloe, and quite satisfied him about the reasons for concealing

it so long, as well as made him see that it would not do to preach upon the subject yet.

“My dear young friend, no levity, if you please;” said the Parson, though himself a little, a very little, prone to it on the sly, among people too solid to stumble. “I draw my lessons from the past, or present. Better men than myself insist upon the terrors of the future, and scare people from looking forward. But our Church, according to my views, is a cheerful and progressive mother, encouraging her children, and fortifying——”

“Quite so;” said Jemmy Fox, anticipating too much on that head; “but she would not fortify us with such a Lenten *fare* as this. Little pun, sir, not so very bad. However, to business. I meant to have told you nothing of this till Monday or Tuesday, until it struck me that you would be hurt perhaps, if the notice were so very short. The great point is that not a word of our intentions should get abroad, or the rogues might make themselves more scarce than rogues unluckily are allowed to be. This is why we have put off our application to Mockham, until Tuesday morning; and even then we shall lay our information as privately as possible. But we must have a powerful *posse*, when we proceed to arrest them; for one of the men, as I told you, is of tremendous bulk and stature, and the other not a weakling. And perhaps the third, the fellow they come to meet, will show fight on their behalf. We must allow no chance of escape, and possibly they may have fire-arms. We shall want at least four constables, as well as Gronow, and myself.”

“But all good subjects of the King are bound to

assist, if called upon in the name of His Majesty, at the execution of a warrant."

"So they are; but they never do it, even when there is no danger. In the present case, they would boldly run away. And more than that, by ten o'clock on Fair-night, how will His Majesty's true lieges be? Unable to keep their own legs, I fear. The trouble will be to keep our own force sober. But Gronow has undertaken to see to that. If he can do it, we shall be all right. We may fairly presume that the enemy also will not be too steady upon their pins. The only thing I don't like is that a man of Gronow's age should be in the scuffle. He has promised to keep in the background; but if things get lively, can I trust him?"

"I should think it very doubtful. He looks an uncommonly resolute man. If there is a conflict, he will be in it. But do you think that the big man Harvey really is our Zippy's father? If so, I am puzzled by what his mother said; and I think the old lady was truthful. So far as I could understand what she said, her son had never been engaged in any of the shocking work we hear so much of now. And she would not have denied it from any sense of shame, for she confessed to even worse things, on the part of other sons."

"She may not have known it. He has so rarely been at home. A man of that size would have been notorious throughout the parish, if he had ever lived at home; whereas nobody knows him, not even Joe Crang, who knows every man and horse for miles around. But the Whetstone people are a tribe apart, and keep all their desolate region to themselves."

"The district is extra-parochial, a sort of No-man's land almost," Mr. Penniloe answered thoughtfully. "An entire parish intervenes between their hill and Hagdon; so that I cannot go among them, without seeming to intrude upon a neighbour's duties. Otherwise it is very sad to think that a colony almost of heathens should be permitted in the midst of us. I hear that there is a new landowner now, coming from your father's part of the country, who claims seigniorial rights over them, which they intend to resist with all their might."

"To be sure. Sir Henry Haggerstone is the man, a great friend of mine, and possibly something nearer before long. He cares not a pin for the money; but he is not the man to forego his rights, especially when they are challenged. I take a great interest in those people. Sir Henry promised me an introduction, through his steward, or whoever it is; and but for this business I should have gone over. But as these two fellows have been among them, I thought it wiser to keep away. I intend to know more of them, when this is over. I rather like fellows who refuse to pay."

"You have plenty of experience of them, doctor, without going over to the Whetstone. Would that we had a few gratuitous Church-builders, as well as a gratuitous doctor in this parish! But I sadly fear that your services will be too much in demand after this arrest. You should have at least six constables, if our people will not help you. Supposing that the Whetstone men are there, would they not attempt a rescue?"

"No sir; they will not be there; it is not their custom. I am ashamed, as it is, to take four men against two, and would not, except for the great importance of

it. But I am keeping you too long. I shall make a point of beholding you no more, until Wednesday morning; except of course in church on Sunday. You must be kept out of it altogether. It is not for me to tell you what to do; but I trust that you will not add to our anxieties, by appearing at all in the matter. Your busiest time of the year is at hand; and I scarcely know whether I have done right, in worrying you at all about this affair."

"Truly the time is appointed now for conflict with the unseen powers, rather than those of our own race. But why are we told to gird our loins—of which succincture the Spencer is expressive, and therefore curtly clerical—unless we are also to withstand evil-doers, even in the market-place? Peace is a thing that we all desire; but no man must be selfish of it. If every man stuck to his own corner only, would there ever be a dining-table? Be not surprised then, Master Jemmy Fox, if I should appear upon the warlike scene. As the Statesmen of the age say—when they don't know what to say—I reserve my right of action."

Fox was compelled to be satisfied with this because he could get no better. Yet he found it hard to be comfortable about the now urgent outlook. Beyond any doubt, he must go through with the matter in hand, and fight it well out. But where would he be, if the battle left him, with two noble heroes disabled, and both of them beyond the heroic time of life. As concerned himself, he was quite up for the fight, and regarded the prospect with pleasure, as behoves a young man, who requires a little change, and has a lady-love who will rejoice in his feats. Moreover he knew that

he was very quick of foot, and full of nimble dodges; but these elderly men could not so skip away, even if their dignity allowed it. After much grim meditation, when he left the rectory, he made up his mind to go straight to Squire Mockham; and although it was a doubtful play of cards, to consult thus informally the Justice, before whom the information was soon to be laid: it seemed to him, on the whole, to be the proper course. On Tuesday it would be too late to receive any advice upon the subject.

But Mr. Mockham made no bones of it. Whether he would grant the warrant or not, was quite another question, and must depend upon the formal depositions when received. The advice that he gave was contingent only upon the issue of the warrant, as to which he could say nothing yet. But he did not hesitate, as the young man's friend, to counsel him about his own share in the matter.

"Keep all your friends out of it. Let none of them be there. The execution of a warrant is the duty of the Authorities, not of amateurs and volunteers. Even you yourself should not appear, unless it be just to identify; though afterwards you must do so, of course, when the charge comes to be heard. Better even that criminals should escape, than that non-official persons should take the business on themselves. As a magistrate's son, you must know this."

"That is all very well, in an ordinary case," said Fox, who had got a great deal more than he wanted. "But here it is of such extreme importance to get to the bottom of this matter; and if they escape, where are we?"

"All very true. But if you apply to the law, you must let the law do its own work, and in its own way, though it be not perfect. All you can do is to hope for the best."

"And probably get the worst," said Jemmy, with a grin of resignation. "But I suppose I may be at hand, and ready to give assistance, if called upon?"

"Certainly," answered Mr. Mockham, rubbing his hands gently; "that is the privilege of every subject, though not claimed very greedily. By-the-by, I was told that there is to be some sort of wrestling at your Fair this year. Have you heard anything about it?"

"Well, perhaps a little." The young man looked slyly at the Magistrate, for one of the first things he had heard was that Mockham had started the scheme by giving ten guineas towards the prize-fund. "Among other things I heard that Polwarth is coming, the Cornish champion, as they call him."

"And he holds the West of England belt. It is too bad," said the Magistrate, "that we should have no man to redeem it. When I was a boy, we should all have been mad, if the belt had gone over the border long. But who is there now? The sport is decaying, and fisticuffs (far more degrading work) are ousting it altogether. I think you went to see the play last year."

"I just looked in at it, once or twice. It did not matter very much to me, as a son of Somerset; but it must have been very grievous to a true Devonian, to see Cornwall chucking his countrymen about, like a lot of wax-headed ninepins. And no doubt he will do the same thing this year. You can't help it—can you, Squire?"

"Don't be too sure of that, my friend. A man we never heard of has challenged for the belt, on behalf of Devon. He will not play in the standards, but have best of three backs with the Cornishman, for the belt and a special prize raised by subscription. When I was a lad I used to love to see it, ay, and I knew all the leading men. Why, all the great people used to go to see it then. The Lord Lieutenant of the county would come down from Westminster for any great match; and as for Magistrates—well, the times are changed."

"You need not have asked me the news, I see. To know all about it, I must come to you. I should have been glad to see something of it, if it is to be such a big affair. But that will be impossible on account of this job. Good night, sir. Twelve o'clock, I think you said, will suit for our application?"

"Yes, and to stop malicious mouths—for they get up an outcry, if one knows anybody—I shall get Sir Edwin Sanford to join me. He is in the Commission for Somerset too; and so we can arrange it—if issued at all, to hold good across the border."

CHAPTER XI.

A WRESTLING BOUT.

VALENTINE'S DAY was on Sunday that year, and a violent gale from the south and west set in before daylight, and lasted until the evening, without bringing any rain. Anxiety was felt about the Chancel roof, which had only been patched up temporarily, and waterproofed with thick tarpaulins; for the Exeter builders had ceased work entirely during that December frost, and as yet

had not returned to it. To hurry them, while engaged elsewhere, would not have been just, or even wise, inasmuch as they might very fairly say, "let us have a little balancing of books first, if you please."

However, the old roof withstood the gale, being sheltered from the worst of it, and no further sinking of the wall took place; but at the Abbey, some fifty yards eastward, a very sad thing came to pass. The south-western corner and the western end (the most conspicuous part remaining) were stripped, as if by a giant's rip-hook, of all their dark mantle of ivy. Like a sail blown out of the bolt-ropes, away it all went bodily, leaving the white flint rough and rugged, and staring like a suburban villa of the most choice effrontery. The contrast with the remainder of the ruins and the old stone church was hideous; and Mr. Penniloe at once resolved to replace and secure afresh as much of the fallen drapery as had not been shattered beyond hope of life. Walter Haddon very kindly offered to supply the ladders, and pay half the cost; for the picturesque aspect of his house was ruined by this bald background. This job was to be put in hand on Thursday; but worse things happened before that day.

"Us be going to have a bad week of it," old Channing, the clerk, observed on Monday, as he watched the four vanes on the tower (for his eyes were almost as keen as ever) and the woodcock feathers on the western sky; "never knowed a dry gale yet, but were follered by a wet one twice as bad; leastways, if a' coom from the Dartmoor mountains."

However, things seemed right enough on Tuesday morning, to people who seldom think much of the sky;

and the rustics came trooping in to the Fair, as brave as need be, and with all their Sunday finery. A prettier lot of country girls no Englishman might wish, and perhaps no other man might hope to see, than the laughing, giggling, blushing, wondering, simpering, fluttering, or bridling maidens, fresh from dairy, or churn, or linhay, but all in very bright array, with love-knots on their breasts, and lavender in their pocket-handkerchiefs. With no depressing elegance perhaps among them, and no poetic sighing for impossible ideals; and probably glancing backwards, more than forwards on the path of life, because the rule and the practice is, for the lads of the party to walk behind.

Louts are these, it must be acknowledged, if looked at from too high a point; and yet, in their way, not by any means so low, as a topper on the high horse, with astral spurs, and a banner of bad Latin, might condemn them for to be. If they are clumsy, and awkward, and sheepish, and can only say—"Thank 'e, sir! Veyther is quite well," in answer to "How are you to-day, John?"—some of it surely is by reason of a very noble quality, now rarer than the great auk's egg; and known, while it was a noun still substantive, as modesty. But there they were, and plenty of them, in the year 1836; and they meant to spend their money in good fairing, if so be their girls were kind.

Mr. Penniloe had a lot of good heart in him; and when he came out to stand by the bellman, and trumpeter who thrilled the market-place, his common sense, and knowledge of the darker side, had as much as they could do to back him up against the impression of the fair young faces, that fell into the dumps, at his sad

decree. The strong evil-doers were not come yet, their time would not begin till the lights began to flare, and the dark corners hovered with temptation. Silence was enjoined three times by ding-dong of bell and blare of trump, and thrice the fatal document was read with stern solemnity and mute acceptance of every creature except ducks, whom nothing short of death can silence, and scarcely even that when once their long valves quiver with the elegiac strain.

The trumpeter from Exeter, with scarlet sash and tassel, looked down from an immeasurable height upon the village bellman, and a fiddler in the distance, and took it much amiss that he should be compelled to time his sonorous blasts by the tinkle tinkle of old nunks.

"Truly, I am sorry," said the Curate to himself, while lads and lasses, decked with primrose, and the first white violets, whispered sadly to one another—"no more fairing after this"—"I am sorry that it should be needful to stop all these innocent enjoyments."

"Then why did you send for me, sir?" asked the trumpeter rather savagely, as one who had begged at the rectory for beer, to medicate his lips against the twang of brass, but won not a drop from Mrs. Muggridge.

Suddenly there came a little volley of sharp drops—not of the liquid he desired—dashed into the trumpeter's red face, and against the back of the Parson's hat—the first skit of rain, that seemed rather to rise, as if from a blow-pipe, than fall from the clouds. Mr. Peniloe hastened to his house close by, for the market-place was almost in a straight line with the school, and taking his old gingham umbrella, set off alone for a

hamlet called Southend, not more than half a mile from the village. Although not so learned in the weather as his clerk, he could see that the afternoon was likely to prove wet, and the longer he left it the worse it would be, according to all indications. Without any thought of adversaries, he left the village at a good brisk pace, to see an old parishioner of whose illness he had heard.

Crossing a meadow on his homeward course he observed that the footpath was littered here and there with strips and patches of yellow osier peel, as if, since he had passed an hour or so ago, some idle fellow had been "whittling" wands from a withy-bed which was not far off. For a moment he wondered what this could mean; but not a suspicion crossed his mind of a rod in preparation for his own back.

Alas, too soon was this gentleman enlightened. The lonely footpath came sideways into a dark and still more lonesome lane, deeply sunk between tangled hedges, except where a mouldering cob wall stood, sole relic of a worn-out linhay. Mr. Penniloe jumped lightly from the treddled stile into the mucky and murky lane, congratulating himself upon shelter here, for a squally rain was setting in; but the leap was into a den of wolves.

From behind the cob wall, with a yell, out rushed four hulking fellows, long of arm and leg, still longer of the weapons in their hands. Each of them bore a white withy switch, flexible, tough, substantial, seemly instrument for a pious verger—but what would pious vergers be doing here, and why should their faces retire from view? Each of them had tied across his most expressive, and too distinctive part, a patch of white

muslin, such as imparts the sweet sense of modesty to a chamber-window; but modesty in these men was small.

Three of them barred the Parson's road, while the fourth cut off his communications in the rear; but even so did he not perceive the full atrocity of their intentions. To him they appeared to be inditing of some new form of poaching, or some country game of skill perhaps, or these might be rods of measurement.

"Allow me to pass, my friends," he said; "I shall not interfere with your proceedings. Be good enough to let me go by."

"Us has got a little bit o' zummat," said the biggest of them, with his legs astraddle, "to goo with 'e, Passon, and to 'baide with 'e a bit. A choice bit of fairing, zort o' peppermint stick, or stick lickerish."

"I am not a fighting man; but if any man strikes me, let him beware for himself. I am not to be stopped on a public highway, like this."

As Mr. Penniloe spoke, he unwisely closed his umbrella, and holding it as a staff of defence, advanced against the enemy.

One step was all the advance he made, for ere he could take another, he was collared, and tripped up, and cast forward heavily upon his forehead. There certainly was a great stone in the mud; but he never knew whether it was that, or a blow from a stick, or even the ebony knob of his own umbrella, that struck him so violently as he fell; but the effect was that he lay upon his face, quite stunned, and in danger of being smothered in the muck.

"Up with's coat-tails! Us'll dust his jacket. Ring the bull on 'un—one, two, dree, vour."

The four stood round, with this very fine Christian, ready—as the Christian faith directs, for weak members, not warmed up with it,—ready to take everything he could not help; and the four switches hummed in the air with delight, like the thirsty swords of Homer; when a rush as of many winds swept them back to innocence. A man of great stature, and with blazing eyes, spent no words upon them, but lifted up the biggest with a chuck below his chin, which sent him sprawling into the ditch, with a broken jaw, then took another by the scruff of his small clothes, and hefted him into a dog-rose stool, which happened to stand on the top of the hedge with shark's teeth ready for their business; then he leaped over the prostrate Parson, but only smote vacant air that time. "The devil, the devil, 'tis the devil himself!" cried the two other fellows, cutting for their very lives.

"Reckon, I were not a breath too soon;" said the man who had done it, as he lifted Mr. Penniloe, whose lips were bubbling and nose clotted up; "why, they would have killed 'e in another minute, my dear. D—d if I bain't afeared they has done it now."

That the clergyman should let an oath pass unrebuked, would have been proof enough to any one who knew him that it never reached his mind. His silver hair was clogged with mud, and his gentle face begrimed with it, and his head fell back between the big man's knees, and his blue eyes rolled about without seeing earth or heaven.

"That doiled Jemmy Fox, we wants 'un now. Never knowed a doctor come, when a' were wanted. Holloa, you be moving there, be you? You dare stir, you murderer!" It was one of the men lately pitched into

the hedge; but he only groaned again, at that great voice.

“Do ’e veel a bit better now, my dear? I’ve a girt mind to kill they two hosebirds in the hedge; and what’s more, I wull, if ’e don’t came round pretty peart.”

As if to prevent the manslaughter threatened, the Parson breathed heavily once or twice, and tried to put his hand to his temples; and then looked about with a placid amazement.

“You ’bide there, sir, for a second,” said the man, setting him carefully upon a dry bank with his head against an ash-tree. “Thy soul shall zee her desire of thine enemies, as I’ve a’read when I waz a little buy.”

To verify this promise of Holy Writ, he took up the stoutest of the white switches, and visiting the ditch first, and then the hedge-trough, left not a single accessible part of either of those ruffians without a weal upon it as big as his thumb, and his thumb was not a little one. They howled like a couple of pigs at the blacksmith’s, when he slips the ring into their noses red-hot; and it is lawful to hope that they felt their evil deeds.

“T’other two shall have the very same, bumbai; I knows where to put hands on ’em both;” said the operator, pointing towards the village; and it is as well to mention that he did it.

“Now, sir, you come along of I.” He cast away the fourth rod, having elicited their virtues, and taking Mr. Penniloe in his arms, went steadily with him to the nearest house. This stood alone in the outskirts of the village; and there two very good old ladies lived, with a handsome green railing in front of them.

These, after wringing their hands for some minutes, enabled Mr. Penniloe to wash his face and head, and gave him some red currant wine, and sent their child of all work for Mrs. Muggridge. Meanwhile the Parson began to take a more distinct view of the world again, his first emotion being anxiety about his Sunday beaver, which he had been wearing in honour of the Proclamation—the last duty it was ever destined to discharge. But the “gigantic individual,” as the good ladies called him, was nowhere to be seen, when they mustered courage to persuade one another to peep outside the rails.

By this time the weather was becoming very bad. Everybody knows how a great gale rises; not with any hurry, or assertion of itself, (as a little squall does, that is limited for time) but with a soft hypocritical sigh, and short puffs of dissimulation. The solid great storm, that gets up in the south, and means to make every tree in England bow, to shatter the spray on the Land’s-end cliffs while it shakes all the towers of London, begins its advance without any broad rush, but with many little ticklings of the space it is to sweep. A trumpery frolic where four roads meet, a woman’s umbrella turned inside out, a hat tossed into a horse-pond perhaps, a weather-cock befooled into chase of head with tail, and a clutch of big raindrops sheafed into the sky and shattered into mist again—these, and a thousand other little pranks and pleasantries, are as the shrill admonitions of the fife, in the vanguard of the great invasion of the heavens.

But what cares a man, with his money in his pockets, how these larger things are done? And even

if his money be yet to seek, still more shall it preponderate. A tourney of wrestlers for cash and great glory was crowding the courtyard of the *Ivy-bush* with every man who could raise a shilling. A steep roof of rick-cloth and weatherproof canvas, supported on a massive ridge-pole would have protected the enclosure from any ordinary storm; but now the tempestuous wind was tugging, whistling, panting, shrieking, and with great might thundering, and the violent rain was pelting, like the rattle of pebbles on the Chessil beach, against the strained canvas of the roof; while the rough hoops of candles inside were swinging, with their crops of guttering tallow welted, like sucked stumps of *Asparagus*. Nevertheless the spectators below, mounted on bench, or stool, or trestle, or huddled against the rope-ring, were jostling, and stamping, and craning their necks, and digging elbows into one another, and yelling, and swearing, and waving rotten hats, as if the only element the Lord ever made was mob.

Suddenly all jabber ceased, and only the howls of the storm were heard, and the patter from the sodden roof, as Polwarth of Bodmin, having taken formal back from Dascombe of Devon, (the winner of the Standards, a very fine player, but not big enough for him) skirred his flat hat into the middle of the sawdust, and stood there flapping his brawny arms, and tossing his big-rooted nose, like a bull. In the flare of the lights, his grin looked malignant, and the swing of his bulk overweening; and though he said nothing but "Cornwall for ever!" he said it as if it meant—"Devonshire be d—d!"

After looking at the company with mild contempt,

he swaggered towards the umpires, and took off his belt, with the silver buckles and the red stones flashing, and hung it upon the cross-rail for defiance. A shiver and a tremble of silence ran through the hearts, and on the lips of three hundred sad spectators. Especially a gentleman who sate behind the umpires, dressed in dark riding-suit and a flapped hat, was swinging from side to side with strong feeling.

“Is there no man to try a fall for Devonshire? Won’t kill him to be beaten. Consolation money, fifty shillings.” The chairman of the Committee announced; but nobody came forward.

A deep groan was heard from old Channing the Clerk, who had known such very different days; while the Cornishman made his three rounds of the ring, before he should buckle on the belt again; and snorted each time, like Goliath. Gathering up the creases of his calves, which hung like the chins of an Alderman, he stuck his heels into the Devonshire earth, to ask what it was made of. Then, with a smile, which he felt to be kind, and heartily large to this part of the world, he stooped to pick up the hat gay with seven ribbons, wrung from Devonshire button-holes.

But behold, while his great hand was going to pick it up thus carelessly, another hat struck it, and whirled it away, as a quoit strikes a quoit that appears to have won.

“Devon for ever! And Cornwall to the Devil!” A mighty voice shouted, and a mighty man came in, shaking the rain and the wind from his hair. A roar of hurrahs overpowered the gale, as the man taking heed of nobody, strode up to the belt, and with a pat of his left hand, said—“I wants this here little bit of ribbon.”

"Thee must plai for 'un fust," cried the hero of Cornwall.

"What else be I come for?" the other enquired.

When formalities had been satisfied, and the proper clothing donned, and the champions stood forth in the ring, looking at one another, the roof might have dropped, without any man heeding, until it came across his eyes.

The challenger's name had been announced—"Harvey Tremlett, of Devonshire"—but only one or two besides old Channing had any idea who he was; and even old Channing was not aware that the man had been a wrestler from early youth, so seldom had he visited his native place.

"A' standeth like a man as understood it," "A' be bigger in the back than Carnishman," "Hope a' hath trained, or's wind won't hold;" sundry such comments of critical power showed that the public, as usual, knew ten times as much as the performers.

These, according to the manner of the time, were clad alike, but wore no pads, for the brutal practice of kicking was now forbidden at meetings of the better sort. A jacket, or jerkin, of tough sail-cloth, half-sleeved and open in front afforded firm grasp, but no clutch for throttling; breeches of the stoutest cord, belted at waist and strapped at knee, red worsted stockings for Devonshire, and yellow on behalf of Cornwall, completed their array; except that the Cornishman wore ankle-boots, while the son of Devon, at his own request, was provided only with sailor's pumps. The advantage of these, for lightness of step and pliancy of sole, was obvious; but very few players would venture upon them, at the risk

of a crushed and disabled foot. "Fear he bain't nim' enough for they pea-shells. They be all very well for a boy;" said Channing.

The Cornishman saw that he had found his match, perhaps even his master in bodily strength, if the lasting power could be trusted. Skill and endurance must decide the issue, and here he knew his own pre-eminence. He had three or four devices of his own invention, but of very doubtful fairness; if all other powers failed, he would have recourse to them.

For two or three circuits of the ring, their mighty frames and limbs kept time and poise with one another. Each with his left hand grasped the other by the shoulder lappet; each kept his right hand hovering like a hawk, and the fingers in ply for a dash, a grip, a tug. Face to face, and eye to eye, intent upon every twinkle, step for step they marched sideways, as if to the stroke of a heavy bell, or the beating of slow music. Each had his weight thrown slightly forwards, and his shoulders slouched a little, watching for one unwary move, and testing by some subtle thrill the substance of the other, as a glass is filliped to try its ring.

By a feint of false step, and a trick of eye, Polwarth got an opening. In he dashed, the other's arm flew up, and the Cornish grip went round him. In vain he put forth his mighty strength, for there was no room to use it. Down he crashed, but turned in falling, so that the back was doubtful.

"Back"! "Fair back"! "No back at all." "Four pins." "Never, no, three pins." "See where his arm was?" "Foul, foul, foul!" Shouts of wrath, and even blows ensued; for a score or two of Cornishmen were there.

“Hush for the Umpires!” “Hold your noise.” “Thee be a liar.” “So be you.” The wind and the rain were well out-roared, until the Umpires, after some little consultation gave award.

“We allow it true back, for Cornwall. Unless the fall claims foul below belt. If so, it will be for Referee.” Which showed that they differed upon that point.

“Let ’un have it. I won’t claim no foul. Let ’un do it again, if ’a can.” Thus spake the fallen man, striding up to the Umpires’ post. A roar of cheers rang round the tent, though many a Devonshire face looked glum, and a few groans clashed with the frank hurrahs.

The second bout was a brief one, but afforded much satisfaction to all lovers of fair play, and therefore perhaps to the Cornishmen. What Tremlett did was simply this. He feigned to be wholly absorbed in guarding against a repetition of the recent trick. The other expecting nothing more than tactics of defence was caught, quite unawares, by his own device, and down he went—a very candid four-pin fall.

Now came the final bout, the supreme decision of the tie, the crowning struggle for the palm. The issue was so doubtful, that the oldest and most sage of all palæstric oracles could but look,—and feared that voice might not prove—wise. Skill was equally divided, (setting dubious tricks aside), strength was a little in favour of Devon, but not too much turn of the balance, (for Cornwall had not produced a man of such magnitude for many years) experience was on Cornwall’s side; condition, and lasting power, seemed to be pretty fairly on a par. What was to settle it? Devonshire knew.

That is to say, the fair County had its hopes,—though always too modest and frugal to back them—that something which it produces even more freely than fair cheeks and kind eyes, and of which the corner land is not so lavish—to wit fine temper, and tranquillity of nature, might come to their mother's assistance. Even for fighting, no man is at the best of himself, when exasperated. Far less can he be so in the gentler art.

A proverb of large equity, and time-honoured wisdom, declares (with the bluntness of its race) that "sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander." This maxim is pleasant enough to the goose; but the gander sputters wrathfully when it comes home to his breast. Polwarth felt it as a heinous outrage, that he had been the victim of his own device. As he faced his rival for the last encounter, a scowl came down upon his noble knobby forehead, his keen eyes glowered as with fire in his chest, and his wiry lips closed viciously. The Devonshire man, endowed with larger and less turbid outlook, perceived that the other's wrath was kindled, and his own duty was to feed the flame.

Accordingly, by quiet tricks, and flicks, such as no man would even feel unless already too peppery, he worked the moral system hard, and roused in the other's ample breast—or brain, if that be the combative part—a lofty disdain of discretion. Polwarth ground his teeth, and clenched his fist, spat fire—and all was up with him. One savage dash he made, which might have swept a milestone backward, breast clashed on breast, he swung too high, the great yellow legs forsook the earth, and the great red ones flashed between them,

then the mighty frame span in the air like a flail, and fell flat as the blade of a turf-beater's spade.

"All over! All up! Needn't ask about that. Three times three for Devonshire! Again, again, again! Carnies, what can 'e say to that now?"

Wild triumph, fierce dejection, yearning to fight it out prevailed; every man's head was out of the government of his neck—when these two leading Counties were quenched alike. The great pole of red pine, fit mast for an Admiral, bearing all the structure overhead, snapped, like a carrot, to a vast wild blast. In a weltering squash lay victor and vanquished, man with his fists up, and man eager to go at him, hearts too big to hold themselves for exultation, and hearts so low that wifely touch was needed to encourage them, glorious head that had won fifty shillings, and poor numskull that had lost a pot of beer. Prostrate all, with mouths full of tallow, sawdust, pitch, and another fellow's toes. Many were for a twelvemonth limpers; but nobody went to Churchyard.

CHAPTER XII.

A FIGHTING BOUT.

AFTER that mighty crash, every body with any sense left in its head went home. There was more to talk about than Perlycross had come across in half a century. And the worst of it was, that every blessed man had his own troubles first to attend to; which is no fun at all, though his neighbour's are so pleasant. The Fair, in the covered market-place, had long been a dreary concern, contending vainly against the stronger

charm of the wrestling booth, and still more vainly against the furious weather. Even the biggest and best fed flares—and they were quite as brisk in those days as they are now—gifted though they might be with rage and vigour, lost all self-control, and dashed in yellow forks, here, there and everywhere, singeing sometimes their own author's whiskers. Like a man who lives too fast, they killed themselves; and the poor Cheap-Jacks, the Universal Oracles, the Benevolent Bounty-men, chucking guineas right and left, the Master of Cupid's bower, who supplied every lass with a lord, and every lad with a lady having a lapful of a hundred thousand pounds—sadly they all strapped up, and lit their pipes, and shivered at that terrible tramp before them, cursing the weather, and their wives, and even the hallowed village of Perlycross.

Though the coaches had forsaken this ancient track from Exeter to London, and followed the broader turnpike roads, there still used to be every now and then a string of pack-horses, or an old stage-waggon, not afraid of hills and making no fuss about time, but straggling at leisure through the pristine thoroughfares, thwarted less with toll-bars.

Notably, old Hill's *God-be-with-us* van left Exeter on Tuesdays, with the goodwill of three horses, some few hours in the afternoon, and might be trusted to appear at Perlycross according to the weather and condition of the roads. What more comfortable course of travel could there be for any one who understood it, and enjoyed sound sleep, and a good glass of ale at intervals, with room enough to dine inside if he thought fit, than the *God-be-with-us* van afforded? For old Hill was

always in charge of it himself, and expected no more than a penny a mile, and perhaps the power to drink the good health of any peaceful subject of the King, who might be inclined to come along with him, and listen to his moving tales. The horses were fat, and they rested at night, and took it easily in the daytime; and the leader had three little bells on his neck, looking, when you sat behind him, like a pair of scales; and without them he always declined to take a step, and the wheelers backed him up in that denial. For a man not bound to any domineering hour, or even to a self-important day, the broad-wheeled waggon belonging to old Hill—"Old-as-the Hills" some flippant youngers called him—was as good an engine as need be, for crossing of the country, when it wanted to be crossed, and halting at any town of hospitable turn.

That same Shrove-Tuesday,—and it is well to mark the day, because Master Hill was so superior to dates—this man who asserted the dignity of our race, by not allowing matter to disturb him, was coming down hill with his heavy drag on, in a road that was soft from the goodness of the soil; when a man with two legs made of better stuff than ours, either came out of a gate across the van, or else fairly walked it down by superior speed behind. "Ship ahoy!" he shouted; and old Hill was wide awake, for he had two or three barrels that would keep rolling into the small of his back—as he called it, with his usual oblivion of chronology—and so he was enabled to discern this man, and begin at his leisure to consider him.

If the man had shouted again, or shown any other symptom of small hurry, the driver—or properly speak-

ing the drifter, for the horses did their own driving—would have felt some disappointment in him, as an inferior fellow-creature. But the man on foot, or at least on stumps, was in no more hurry than old Hill himself, and steadfastly trudged to the bottom of the hill, looking only at the horses—a very fine sign.

The land being Devon, it is needless to say that there was no inconsistency about it. Wherever one hill ends, there another begins, with just room enough between them for a horse to spread his legs, and shake himself with self-approbation. And he is pretty sure to find a crystal brook, purling across the road, and twinkling bright temptation to him.

“Hook up skid, and then ’e can jump in;” said old Hill in the hollow where the horses backed, and he knew by the clank that it had been done, and then by a rattle on the floor behind him, that the stranger had embarked by the chains at the rear. After about a mile or so of soft low whistling, in which he excelled all Carriers, old Hill turned round with a pleasant grin, for there was a great deal of good about him.

“Going far?” He asked, as an opening of politeness, rather than of curiosity.

“Zort of a place, called Perlycrass;” replied the wooden-leg’d man, who was sitting on a barrel. Manifestly an ancient sailor, weather-beaten, and taciturn, the residue of a strong and handsome man.

The whole of this had been as nearly to the Carrier’s liking, as the words and deeds of any man can be to any other’s. Therefore before another mile had been travelled, old Hill turned round again, with a grin still sweeter.

"Pancake day, bain't it?" was his very kind enquiry.

"B'lieve it be;" replied the other, in the best and truest British style. After this no more was lacking to secure old Hill's regard than the very thing the sailor did. There was a little flap of canvas, like a loophole in the tilt, fitted for the use of chawers, and the cleanliness of the floor. Timberlegs after using this, with much deliberation and great skill, made his way forward, and in deep silence poked old Hill with his open tobacco-box. If it were not silver, it was quite as good to look at, and as bright as if it held the freedom of the City; the tobacco, moreover, was of goodly reek, and a promise of inspiration such as never flows through Custom-house.

"Thank 'e, I'll have a blade bumbai. Will 'e zit upon that rope of onions?" The sailor shook his head; for the rim of a barrel, though apt to cut, cuts evenly like a good school-master.

"Long of Nelson?" Master Hill enquired, pointing to the places where the feet were now of deputy. The old Tar nodded; and then with that sensitive love of accuracy which marks the Tar, growled out, "Least-ways, wan of them."

"And what come to t'other wan?" Master Hill was capable of really large human interest.

"Had 'un off, to square the spars, and for sake of vamily." He had no desire to pursue the subject, and closed it by a big squirt through the flap.

Old Hill nodded with manly approbation. Plymouth was his birthplace; and he knew that other sons of Nelson had done this; for it balanced their bodies, and

composed their minds with another five shillings a week for life, and the sale of the leg covered all expenses.

"You'm a very ingenious man;" he glanced as he spoke, at the sailor's jury-rig; "I'll war'n no doctor could a' vitted 'e up, like thiccy."

"Vitted 'un myself with double swivel. Can make four knots an hour now. They doctors can undo 'e; but 'em can't do 'e up. A cove can't make sail upon a truck-head."

"And what do 'e say to the weather, Cap'n?" Master Hill enquired of his passenger, when a few more compliments had passed, and the manes of the horses began to ruffle, and the tilt to sway and rattle with the waxing storm.

"Think us shall have as big a gale of wind as ever come out of the heavens," the sailor replied, after stumping to the tail of the van, and gazing windwards; "heave to pretty smart, and make all snug afore sunset, is my advice. Too much sail on this here little craft, for such a blow as us shall have to-night."

"Can't stop short of Taunton town." Old Hill was famed for his obstinacy.

"Can 'e take in sail? Can 'e dowse this here canvas? Can 'e reef it then somehow?" The old man shook his head. "Tell 'e what then, shipmate—if 'e carry on for six hours more, this here craft will be on her beam-ends, wi'out mainsail parteth from his lashings, sure as my name is Dick Herniman."

This Tar of the old school, better known as "timber-leg'd Dick," disembarked from the craft, whose wreck he had thus predicted, at a turning betwixt Perlton and Perlicross, and stumped away up a narrow lane, at

a pace quite equal to that of the *God-be-with-us* van. The horses looked after him, as a specimen of biped hitherto beyond their experience; and old Hill himself, though incapable of amazement (which is a rapid process) confessed that there were some advantages in this form of human pedal, as well as fine economy of cloth and leather.

“How ’a doth get along, nimbler nor I could!” the Carrier reflected, as his nags drove on again. “Up to zummat ratchety, I’ll be bound he be now. A leary old salt as ever lived. Never laughed once, never showed a smile, but gotten it all in his eyes he have: and the eyes be truer folks than the lips. Enough a’most to tempt a man to cut off ’s own two legses.”

Some hours later than this, and one hour later than the downfall of the wrestler’s roof, the long marketplace, forming one side of the street—a low narrow building set against the churchyard wall, between the school and the lych-gate, looked as dismal, and dreary, and deserted, as the bitterest enemy of Fairs could wish. The torrents of rain, and fury of the wind, had driven all pleasure-seekers, in a grievously drenched and battered plight, to seek for wiser comfort; and only a dozen or so of poor creatures, either too tipsy to battle with the wind, or too reckless in their rags to care where they were, wallowed upon sacks, and scrabbled under the stanchion-boards, where the gaiety had been. The main gates, buckled back upon their heavy hinges, were allowed to do nothing in their proper line of business, until the Church-clock should strike twelve, for such was the usage; though as usual nobody had ever heard who ordained it. A few oil-lamps were

still in their duty, swinging like welshed horn-poppies in the draught, and shedding a pale and spluttering light.

The man who bore the keys had gone home three times, keeping under hele with his oil-skins on, to ask his wife—who was a woman of some mark—whether he might not lock the gates, and come home and have his bit of bacon. But she having strong sense of duty, and a good log blazing, and her cup of tea, had allowed him very generously to warm his hands a little, and then begged him to think of his family. This was the main thing that he had to do; and he went forth again into the dark, to do it.

Meanwhile, without anybody to take heed (for the Sergeant, ever vigilant, was now on guard in Spain), a small but choice company of human beings, was preparing for action in the old school-porch, which stood at the back of the building. Staffs they had, and handcuffs too, and supple straps, and loops of cord; all being men of some learning in the law, and the crooked ways of people out of harmony therewith. If there had been light enough to understand a smile, they would have smiled at one another, so positive were they that they had an easy job, and so grudgeful that the money should cut up so small. The two worthy constables of Perlycross felt certain that they could do it better by themselves; and the four invoked from Perlton were vexed, to have to act with village lubbers. Their orders were not to go nigh the wrestling, or show themselves inside the market-place, but to keep themselves quiet, and shun the weather, and what was a great deal worse, the beer. Every now and then, the ideas of jolly noises, such as were appropriate to the time, were borne

upon the rollicking wings of the wind into their silent vestibule, suggesting some wiping of lips, which, alas, were ever so much too dry already. At a certain signal, they were all to hasten across the corner of the church-yard, at the back of the market-place, and enter a private door at the east end of the building, after passing through the lych-gate.

Suddenly the rain ceased, as if at sound of trumpet; like the mouth of a cavern the sky flew open, and the wind, leaping three points of the compass, rushed upon the world from the chambers of the west. Such a blast, as had never been felt before, filled the whole valley of the Perle, and flung mowstack, and oakwood, farmhouse, and abbey, under the sweep of its wings as it flew. The roar of the air overpowered the crash of the ruin it made, and left no man the sound of his own voice to himself.

These great swoops of wind always lighten the sky; and as soon as the people blown down could get up, they were able to see the church-tower still upright, though many men swore that they heard it go rock. Very likely it rocked, but could they have heard it?

In the thick of the din of this awful night, when the church-clock struck only five instead of ten—and it might have struck fifty, without being heard—three men managed, one by one, and without any view of one another, to creep along the creases of the storm, and gain the gloomy shelter of the market-place. "Every man for himself," is the universal law, when the heavens are against the whole race of us. Not one of these men cared to ask about the condition of the other two, nor even expected much to see them, though each was

more resolute to be there himself, because of its being so difficult.

"Very little chance of Timberlegs to-night," said one to another, as two of them stood in deep shadow against the back wall, where a voice could be heard if pitched in the right direction; "he could never make way again' a starm like this."

"Thou bee'st a liar," replied a gruff voice, as the clank of metal on the stone was heard. "Timberlegs can goo, where flesh and bone be mollichops." He carried a staff like a long handspike, and prodded the biped on his needless feet, to make him wish to be relieved of them.

"Us be all here now," said the third man, who seemed in the wavering gloom to fill half the place. "What hast thou brought us for, Timber-leg'd Dick?"

"Bit of a job, same as three months back. Better than clam-pits, worn't it now? Got a good offer for thee too, Harvey, for that old ramshackle place. Handy hole for a louderin' job, and not far from them clam-pits."

"Ay, so a' be. Never thought of that. And must have another coney, now they wise 'uns have vound out Nigger's Nock. Lor' what a laugh we had, Jem and I, at they fules of Perlycrass!"

"Then Perlycross will have the laugh at thee. Harvey Tremlett, and James Kettel, I arrest 'e both, in the name of His Majesty the King."

Six able-bodied men (who had entered, unheard in the roar of the gale, and unseen in the gloom), stood with drawn staffs, heels together, and shoulder to shoulder, in a semi-circle, enclosing the three conspirators.

"Read thy warrant aloud," said Dick Herniman,

striking his handspike upon the stones, and taking command in right of intellect; while the other twain laid their backs against the wall, and held themselves ready for the issue.

Dick had hit a very hard nail on the head. None of these constables had been young enough to undergo Sergeant Jakes, and thenceforth defy the most lofty examiner.

"Didn't hear what 'e zed," replied head-constable, making excuse of the wind, which had blown him but little of the elements. But he lowered his staff, and held consultation.

"Then I zay it again," shouted Timber-leg'd Dick, stumping forth with a power of learning, for he had picked up good leisure in hospitals; "if thou representest the King, read His Majesty's words, afore taking his name in vain."

These six men were ready, and resolute enough, to meet any bodily conflict; but the literary crisis scared them.

"Can e' do it, Jack?" "Don't know as I can." "Wish my boy Bill was here." "Don't run in my line"—and so on.

"If none on 'e knows what he be about," said the man with the best legs to stand upon, advancing into the midst of them, "I know a deal of the law; and I tell 'e, as a friend of the King, who hath lost two legs for 'un, in the Royal Navy, there can't be no lawful arrest made here. And the liberty of the subject cometh in, the same as a' doth again' highwaymen. Harvey Tremlett, and Jem Kettel, the law be on your side, to 'protect the liberty of the subject.'"

This was enough for the pair who had stood, as law-abiding Englishmen, against the wall, with their big fists doubled, and their great hearts doubting. "Here goo'th for the liberty of the subject," cried Harvey Tremlett, striding forth; "I shan't strike none as don't strike me. But if a doth, a' must look out."

The constables wavered, in fear of the law, and doubt of their own duty; for they had often heard that every man had a right to know what he was arrested for. Unluckily one of them made a blow with his staff at Harvey Tremlett; then he dropped on the flags with a clump in his ear, and the fight in a moment was raging.

Somebody knocked Jemmy Kettel on the head, as being more easy to deal with; and then the blood of the big man rose. Three stout fellows fell upon him all together, and heavy blows rung on the drum of his chest, from truncheons plied like wheel-spokes. Forth flew his fist-clubs right and left, one of them meeting a staff in the air, and shattering it back into its owner's face. Never was the peace of the King more broken; no man could see what became of his blows, legs and arms went about like windmills, substance and shadow were all as one, till the substance rolled upon the ground, and groaned.

This dark fight resembled the clashing of a hedgerow in the fury of a midnight storm; when the wind has got in and cannot get out, when ground-ash, and sycamore, pole, stub, and saplin, are dashing and whirling against one another, and even the sturdy oak-tree in the trough is swaying, and creaking, and swinging on its bole.

"Zoonder not to kill e'er a wan of 'e, I 'ood. But

by the Lord, if 'e comes they byses"—shouted Harvey Tremlett, as a rope was thrown over his head from behind, but cut in half a second by Herniman—"more of 'e, be there?" as the figures thickened—"have at 'e then, wi' zummat more harder nor visties be!"

He wrenched from a constable his staff, and strode onward, being already near the main gate now. As he whirled the heavy truncheon round his head, the constables hung back, having two already wounded, and one in the grip of reviving Jem, who was rolling on the floor with him. "Zurrender to His Majesty;" they called out, preferring the voluntary system.

"A varden for the lot of 'e!" the big man said, and he marched in a manner that presented it.

But not so did he walk off, blameless and respectable. He had kept his temper wonderfully, believing the law to be on his side, after all he had done for the County.

Now his nature was pressed a little too hard for itself, when just as he had called out—"coom along, Jem; there be nort to stop 'e, Timberlegs;" retiring his forces with honour—two figures, hitherto out of the moil, stood across him at the mouth of exit.

"Who be you?" he asked, with his anger in a flame; for they showed neither staff of the King, nor warrant. "Volunteers, be 'e? Have a care what be about."

"Harvey Tremlett, here you stop." Said a tall man, square in front of him. But luckily for his life, the lift of the sky showed that his hair was silvery.

"Never hits an old man. You lie there;" Tremlett took him with his left hand, and laid him on the stones. But meanwhile the other flung his arms around his waist.

"Wult have a zettler? Then thee shall," cried the

big man, tearing him out like a child, and swinging his truncheon, for to knock him on the head, and Jemmy Fox felt that his time was come.

Down came the truncheon, like a paviour's rammer, and brains would have weltered on the floor like suds, but a stout arm dashed across, and received the crash descending.

"Pumpkins!" cried the smiter, wondering much what he had smitten, as two bodies rolled between his legs and on the stones. "Coom along, Jemmy boy. Nare a wan to stop 'e."

The remnant of the constables upon their legs fell back. The Lord was against them. They had done their best. The next job for them was to heal their wounds, and get an allowance for them, if they could.

Now the human noise was over, but the wind roared on, and the rushing of the clouds let the stars look down again. Tremlett stood victorious in the middle of the gateway. Hurry was a state of mind beyond his understanding. Was everybody satisfied? Well, no one came for more. He took an observation of the weather, and turned round.

"Shan't bide here no longer," he announced. "Dick, us'll vinish up our clack to my place. Rain be droud up, and I be off."

"No, Harvey Tremlett, you will not be off. You will stay here like a man, and stand your trial."

Mr. Penniloe's hand was upon his shoulder, and the light of the stars, thrown in vaporous waves, showed the pale face firmly regarding him.

"Well, and if I says no to it, what can 'e do?"

"Hold you by the collar, as my duty is." The Parson

set his teeth, and his delicate white fingers tightened their not very formidable grasp.

"Sesh!" said the big man, with a whistle, and making as if he could not move. "When a man be baten, a' must gie in. Wun't 'e let me goo, Passon? Do 'e let me goo."

"Tremlett, my duty is to hold you fast. I owe it to a dear friend of mine, as well as to my parish."

"Well, you be a braver man than most of 'em, I zimmeth. But do 'e tell a poor chap, as have no chance at all wi' 'e, what a' hath dooded, to be lawed for 'un so crule now."

"Prisoner, as if you did not know. You are charged with breaking open Colonel Waldron's grave, and carrying off his body."

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord in Heaven!" shouted Harvey Tremlett. "Jem Kettel, hark to thiccy! Timberlegs, do 'e hear thic? All they blessed constables, as had got their bellyful, and ever so many wise gen'lemen too, what do 'e think 'em be arter us for? Arter us for resurrectioneering! Never heered tell such a joke in all my life. They hose-birds to *Ivy-bush* cries 'Carnwall for ever!' But I'm blest if I don't cry out 'Perlycrass for ever!' Oh Lord, oh Lord! Was there ever such a joke? Don't 'e hold me, sir, for half a minute, just while I has out my laugh—fear I should throw 'e down with shaking so."

Timber-leg'd Dick came up to his side, and not being of the laughing kind, made up for it by a little hornpipe in the lee; his metal feet striking, from the flints pitched there, sparks enough to light a dozen pipes; while Kettel, though damaged severely about the

mouth, was still able to compass a broad and loud guffaw.

"Prisoners," Mr. Penniloe said severely, for he disliked the ridicule of his parish; "this is not at all a matter to be laughed at. The evidence against you is very strong, I fear."

"Zurrender, zurrender, to His Majesty the King!" cried Tremlett, being never much at argument. "Constables, if 'ee can goo, take charge. But I 'ont have no handcuffs, mind. Wudn't a gie'd 'ee a clout, if I had knawed it. Zarve 'ee right though, for not rading of thic warrant-papper. Jemmy boy, you zurrender to the King; and I be Passon's prisoner. Honour bright fust though—nort to come agin' us, unless a' be zet down in warrant-papper. Passon, thee must gi'e thy word for that. Timberlegs, coom along for layyer."

"Certainly, I give my word, as far as it will go, that no other charge shall be brought against you. The warrant is issued for that crime only. Prove yourselves guiltless of that, and you are free."

"Us won't be very long in prison then. A day or two bain't much odds to we."

CHAPTER XIII.

GENTLE AS A LAMB.

OF the nine people wounded in that Agoräic struggle, which cast expiring lustre on the Fairs of Perlycross, every one found his case most serious to himself, and still more so to his wife; and even solemn, in the presence of those who had to settle compensation. Herniman had done some execution, as well as received a

nasty splinter of one leg, which broke down after his hornpipe; and Kettel had mauled the man who rolled over with him. But, as appeared when the case was heard, Tremlett had by no means done his best; and his lawyer put it touchingly and with great effect, that he was loth to smite the sons of his native county, when he had just redeemed their glory, by noble discomfiture of Cornwall.

One man only had a parlous wound; and as is generally ordained in human matters, this was the one most impartial of all, the one who had no interest of his own to serve, the one who was present simply out of pure benevolence, and a Briton's love of order. So at least his mother said; and every one acknowledged that she was a woman of high reasoning powers. Many others felt for him, as who would have done the same, with like opportunity.

For only let a healthy, strong, and earnest-minded Englishman—to use a beloved compound epithet of the day—hear of a hot and lawful fight impending, with people involved in it, of whom he has some knowledge, and we may trust him heartily to be there or thereabouts, to see—as he puts it to his conscience—fair play. But an if he chance to be in love just then, with a very large percentage of despair to reckon up, and one of the combatants is in the count against him, can a doubt remain of his eager punctuality?

This was poor Frank Gilham's case. Dr. Gronow was a prudent man, and liked to have the legions on his side. He perceived that young Frank was a staunch and stalwart fellow, sure to strike a good blow on a friend's behalf. He was well aware also of his love for

Christie, and could not see why it should come to nothing. While Jemmy Fox's faith in the resources of the law, and in his own prowess as a power in reserve, were not so convincing to the elder mind. "Better make sure, than be too certain," was a favourite maxim of this shrewd old stager; and so without Jemmy's knowledge he invited Frank, to keep out of sight unless wanted.

This measure saved the life of Dr. Fox, and that of Harvey Tremlett too, some of whose brothers had adorned the gallows. Even as it was, Jemmy Fox lay stunned, with the other man's arm much inserted in his hat. Where he would have been without that arm for buffer, the Cherub, who sits on the chimney-pots of Harley Street, alone can say. Happily the other doctor was unhurt, and left in full possession of his wits, which he at once exerted. After examining the wounded yeoman, who had fainted from the pain and shock, he borrowed a mattress from the rectory, a spring-cart and truss of hay from Channing the baker, and various other appliances; and thus in spite of the storm conveyed both patients to hospital. This was the *Old Barn* itself, because all surgical needs would be forthcoming there more readily, and so it was wiser to decline Mr. Penniloe's offer of the rectory.

With the jolting of the cart, and the freshness of the air, Fox began to revive ere long; and though still very weak and dizzy, was able to be of some service at his own dwelling-place; and although he might not, when this matter first arose, have shown all the gratitude which the sanguine do expect, in return for Frank Gilham's loyalty, he felt very deep contrition now, when

he saw this frightful fracture, and found his own head quite uncracked.

The six constables, though they had some black eyes, bruised limbs, and broken noses, and other sources of regret, were (in strict matter of fact, and without any view to compensation) quite as well as could be expected. And as happens too often, the one who groaned the most had the least occasion for it. It was only the wick of a lamp, that had dropped, without going out, on this man's collar, and burned a little hole in his *niddick*, as it used to be called in Devonshire.

Tremlett readily gave his word that no escape should be attempted; and when Mrs. Muggridge came to know that this was the man who had saved her master, nothing could be too good for him. So constables and prisoners were fed and cared for, and stowed for the night in the long school-room, with hailstones hopping in the fireplace.

In the morning, the weather was worse again; for this was a double-barrel'd gale, as an ignorant man might term it; or rather perhaps two several gales, arising from some vast disturbance, and hitting into one another. Otherwise, why should it be known and remembered even to the present day, as the great Ash-Wednesday gale, although it began on Shrove-Tuesday, and in many parts raged most fiercely then? At Perlycross certainly there was no such blast upon the second day, as that which swept the Abbey down: when the wind leaped suddenly to the west, and the sky fell open, as above recorded.

Upon that wild Ash-Wednesday forenoon, the curate stood in the churchyard mourning, even more than the

melancholy date requires. Where the old Abbey had stood for ages (backing up the venerable church with grand dark-robed solemnity, and lifting the buckler of ancient faith above many a sleeping patriarch) there was nothing but a hideous gap, with murky clouds galloping over it. Shorn of its ivy curtain by the tempest of last Sunday, the mighty frame had reeled, and staggered, and with one crash gone to ground last night, before the impetuous welkin's weight.

"Is all I do to be always vain, and worse than vain—destructive, hurtful, baneful, fatal I might say, to the very objects for which I strive? Here is the church, unfinished, leaky, with one of its corners gone underground, and the grand stone screen smashed in two; here is the Abbey, or alas not here, but only an ugly pile of stones! Here is the outrage to my dear friend, and the shame to the parish as black as ever; for those men clearly know nothing of it. And here, or at any rate close at hand, the sad drawback upon all good works; for at Lady-day in pour the bills, and my prayers (however earnest) will not pay them. It has pleased the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, to leave me very short of cash."

Unhappily his best hat had been spoiled, in that interview with the four vergers; and in his humility he was not sure that the one on his head was good enough even to go to the Communion service. However it need not have felt unworthy; for there was not a soul in the church to be adjured, save that which had been under its own brim. The clerk was off for Perliton, swearing—even at his time of life!—that he had been subpoenaed, as if that could be on such occasion; and

as for the pupils, all bound to be in church, the Hopper had been ordered by the Constables to present himself to the Magistrates (though all the Constables denied it) and Pike, and Mopuss, felt it their duty to go with him.

In a word, all Perlycross was off, though services of the Church had not yet attained their present continuity; and though every woman, and even man, had to plod three splashy miles, with head on chest, in the teeth of the gale up the river. How they should get into the room, when there, was a question that never occurred to them. There they all yearned to be; and the main part, who could not raise a shilling, or prove themselves Uncles, or Aunts, or former sweethearts of the two Constables who kept the door, had to crouch under dripping shrubs outside the windows, and spoiled all Squire Mockham's young crocuses.

That gentleman was so upright, and thoroughly impartial, that to counteract his own predilections for a champion wrestler, he had begged a brother-magistrate to come and sit with him on this occasion; not Sir Edwin Sanford, who was of the Quorum for Somerset, but a man of some learning and high esteem, the well-known Dr. Morshead. Thus there would be less temptation for any tattler to cry, "hole and corner," as spiteful folk rejoice to do, while keeping in that same place themselves. Although there was less perhaps of mischief-making in those days than now; and there could be no more.

The Constables marched in, with puff and blow, like victors over rebels, and as if they had carried the prisoners captive, every yard of the way, from Perlycross. All of them began to talk at once, and to describe with

more vigour than truth the conflict of the night before. But Dr. Morshead stopped them short, for the question of resistance was not yet raised. What the Bench had first to decide was whether a case could be made out for a *mittimus*, in pursuance of the warrant, to the next Petty Sessions on Monday; whence the prisoners would be remitted probably to the Quarter Sessions.

The two accused stood side by side (peaceful and decorous, as if they were accustomed to it); and without any trepidation admitted their identity. It was rather against their interests that the Official Clerk was absent—this not being a stated meeting, but held for special purpose—for Magistrates used to be a little nervous, without their proper adviser; and in fear of permitting the guilty to escape, they sometimes remanded upon insufficient grounds.

In the present case, there was nothing whatever to connect these two men with the crime, except the testimony of Joe Crang, and what might be regarded as their own admission, overheard by Dr. Fox. The latter was not in court, nor likely so to be; and as for the blacksmith's evidence, however positive it might seem, what did it amount to? And such as it was, it was torn to rags, through the quaking of the deponent.

For a sharp little lawyer started up, as lawyers are sure to do everywhere, and crossed the room to where Herniman sat, drumming the floor with metallic power, and looking very stolid. But a glance had convinced the keen Attorney, that here were the brains of the party, and a few short whispers settled it. "Guinea, if 'e gets 'em off; if not, ne'er a farden." "Right!" said the lawyer, and announced himself.

"Blickson, for the defence, your Worships—Maurice Blickson of Silverton." The proper bows were interchanged; and then came Crang's excruciation. Already this sturdy and very honest fellow, was as he elegantly described it, in a "lantern-sweat" of terror. It is one thing to tell a tale to two friends in a potato-field, and another to narrate the same on oath, with four or five quills in mysterious march, two most worshipful signors bending brows of doubt upon you, and thirty or forty faces scowling at every word—"What a liar you be!" And when on the top of all this, stands up a noble gentleman, with keen eyes, peremptory voice, contemptuous smiles, and angry gestures, all expressing his Christian sorrow, that the Devil should have so got hold of you,—what blacksmith, even of poetic anvil (whence all rhythm and metre spring) can have any breath left in his own bellows?

Joe Crang had fallen on his knees, to take the oath; as witnesses did, from a holy belief that this turned the rungs of the gallows the wrong way; and then he had told his little tale most sadly, as one who hopes never to be told of it again. His business had thriven, while his health was undermined; through the scores of good people, who could rout up so much as a knife that wanted a rivet, or even a boy with one tooth pushing up another; and though none of them paid more than fourpence for things that would last them a fortnight to talk about, their money stayed under the thatch, while Joe spent nothing but a wink for all his beer.

But ah, this was no winking time! Crang was beginning to shuffle off, with his knuckles to his forehead; and recovering his mind so loudly that he got in a word

about the quality of his iron—which for the rest of his life he would have cited, to show how he beat the Justesses—when he found himself recalled, and told to put his feet together. This, from long practice of his art, had become a difficulty to him, and in labouring to do it he lost all possibility of bringing his wits into the like position. This order showed Blickson to be almost a Verulam in his knowledge of mankind. Joe Crang recovered no self-possession, on his own side of better than a gallon strong.

“Blacksmith, what o’clock is it now?”

Crang put his ears up, as if he expected the Church-clock to come to his aid; and then with a rally of what he was hoping for, as soon as he got round the corner, replied—‘Four and a half, your honour.’

“I need not remind your Worships,” said Blickson, when the laughter had subsided; “that this fellow’s evidence, even if correct, proves nothing whatever against my Clients. But just to show what it is worth, I will, with your Worships’ permission, put a simple question to him. He has sworn that it was two o’clock on a foggy morning, and with no Church-clock to help him, when he saw, in his night-mare this ghostly vision. Perhaps he should have said—‘four and a half;’ which in broad daylight is his idea of the present hour. Now, my poor fellow, did you swear, or did you not, on a previous occasion, that one of the men who so terrified you out of your heavy sleep, was Dr. James Fox—a gentleman, Dr. Morshead, of your own distinguished Profession? Don’t shuffle with your feet, Crang, nor yet with your tongue. Did you swear that, or did you not?”

“Well, if I did, twadn’t arkerate.”

“In plain English, you perjured yourself on that occasion. And yet you expect their Worships to believe you now! Now look at the other man, the tall one. By which of his features do you recognise him now, at four and a half, in the morning?”

“Dun’now what veitchers be. Knows ’un by his size, and manner of standin’. Should like to hear’s voice, if no object to you, layyer.”

“My friend, you call me by your own name. Such is your confusion of ideas. Will your Worships allow me to assist this poor numskull? The great Cornish wrestler is here, led by that noble fraternal feeling, which is such a credit to all men distinguished in any walk of life. Mr. Polwarth of Bodmin, will you kindly stand by the side of your brother in a very noble art?”

It was worth a long journey in bad weather (as Squire Mockham told his guests at his dinner-party afterwards, and Dr. Morshead and his son confirmed it) to see the two biggest growths of Devonshire and of Cornwall standing thus amicably side by side, smiling a little slyly at each other, and blinking at their Worships with some abashment, as if to say—“this is not quite in our line.”

For a moment the audience forgot itself, and made itself audible with three loud cheers. “Silence!” cried their Worships, but not so very sternly.

“Reckon, I could drow ’e next time;” said Cornwall.

“Wun’t zay but what ’e maight;” answered Devon courteously.

“Now little blacksmith,” resumed the lawyer, though Joe Crang was considerably bigger than himself; “will

you undertake to swear, upon your hope of salvation, which of those two gentlemen you saw, that night?"

Joe Crang stared at the two big men, and his mind gave way within him. He was dressed in his best, and his wife had polished up his cheeks and nose with yellow soap, which gleamed across his vision with a kind of glaze, and therein danced pen, ink, and paper, the figures of the big men, the faces of their Worships, and his own hopes of salvation.

"Maight 'a been Carnisher;" he began to stammer, with a desire to gratify his county; but a hiss went round the room from Devonian sense of Justice; and to strike a better balance, he finished in despair—"Wull then, it waz both on 'em!"

"Stand down, sir!" Dr. Morshead shouted sternly, while Blickson went through a little panorama of righteous astonishment and disgust. All the audience roared, and a solid farmer called out—"Don't come near me, you infernal liar," as poor Crang sought shelter behind his top-coat. So much for honesty, simplicity, and candour, when the nervous system has broken down!

"After that, I should simply insult the intelligence of your Worships," continued the triumphant lawyer, "by proceeding to address you. Perhaps I should ask you to commit that wretch for perjury; but I leave him to his conscience, if he has one."

"The case is dismissed," Dr. Morshead announced, after speaking for a moment to his colleague. "Unless there is any intention to charge these men with resisting or assaulting officers, in the execution of their warrant. It has been reported, though not formally, that some bystander was considerably injured. If any charge is en-

tered on either behalf, we are ready to receive the depositions."

The constables, who had been knocked about, were beginning to consult together, when Blickson slipped among them, after whispering to Herniman, and a good deal of nodding of heads took place, while pleasant ideas were interchanged, such as, "handsome private compensation;" "twenty-five pounds to receive to-night, and such men are always generous;" "a magnificent supper-party at the least, if they are free. If not, all must come to nothing."

The worthy constabulary—now represented by a still worthier body, and one of still finer feeling—perceived the full value of these arguments; and luckily for the accused, Dr. Gronow was not present, being sadly occupied at *Old Barn*.

"Although there is no charge, and no sign of any charge, your Worships, and therefore I have no *locus standi*;" Mr. Blickson had returned to his place, and adopted an airy and large-hearted style; "I would crave the indulgence of the Bench, for one or two quite informal remarks; my object being to remove every stigma from the characters of my respected Clients. On the best authority I may state, that their one desire, and intention, was to surrender, like a pair of lambs"—at this description a grin went round, and the learned Magistrates countenanced it—"if they could only realise the nature of the charge against them. But when they demanded, like Englishmen, to know why their liberty should be suddenly abridged, what happened? No one answered them! All those admirable men were doubtless eager to maintain the best traditions of the law;

but the hurricane out-roared them. They laboured to convey their legal message; but where is education, when the sky falls on its head? On the other hand, one of these law-abiding men had been engaged gloriously, in maintaining the athletic honour of his county. This does not appear to have raised in him, at all, the pugnacity that might have been expected. He strolled into the market-place, partly to stretch his poor bruised legs, and partly perhaps, to relieve his mind; which men of smaller nature would have done, by tippling. Suddenly he is surrounded by a crowd of very strong men in the dark. The Fair has long been over; the lights are burning low; scarcely enough of fire in them to singe the neck of an enterprising member of our brave Constabulary. In the thick darkness, and hubbub of the storm, the hero who has redeemed the belt, and therewith the ancient fame of our county, supposes—naturally supposes, charitable as his large mind is, that he is beset for the sake of the money, which he has not yet received, but intends to distribute so freely, when he gets it. The time of this honourable Bench is too valuable to the public to be wasted over any descriptions of a petty skirmish, no two of which are at all alike. My large-bodied Client, the mighty wrestler, might have been expected to put forth his strength. It is certain that he did not do so. The man, who had smitten down the pride of Cornwall, would strike not a blow against his own county. He gave a playful push or two, a chuck under the chin, such as a pretty milkmaid gets, when she declines a sweeter touch. I marvel at his wonderful self-control. His knuckles were shattered by a blow from a staff; like a roof in a hailstorm his

great chest rang—for the men of Perliton can hit hard—yet is there anything to show that he even endeavoured to strike in return? And how did it end? In the very noblest way. The Pastor of the village, a most saintly man, but less than an infant in Harvey Tremlett's hands, appears at the gate, when there is no other let or hindrance to the freedom of a Briton. Is he thrust aside rudely? Is he kicked out of the way? Nay, he lays a hand upon the big man's breast, the hand of a Minister of the Cross. He explains that the law, by some misapprehension, is fain to apprehend this simple-minded hero. The nature of the sad mistake is explained; and to use a common metaphor, which excited some derision just now, but which I repeat, with facts to back me,—gentle as a lamb, yonder lion surrenders!”

“The lamb is very fortunate in his shepherd;” said Dr. Morshead drily, as the lawyer sat down, under general applause. “But there is nothing before the Bench, Mr. Blickson. What is the object of all this eloquence?”

“The object of my very simple narrative, your Worships, is to discharge my plain duty to my clients. I would ask this Worshipful Bench, not only to dismiss a very absurd application, but also to add their most weighty opinions, that Harvey Tremlett, and James Fox—no, I beg pardon, that was the first mistake of this ever erroneous blacksmith—James Kettel, I should say, have set a fine example of perfect submission to the law of the land.”

“Oh come, Mr. Blickson, that is out of the record. We pronounce no opinion upon that point. We simply adjudge that the case be now dismissed.”

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INLAND RUN.

"WON'ERFUL well, 'e doed it, sir. If ever I gets into Queer Street, you be the one to get me out."

This well-merited compliment was addressed by Dick Herniman to Attorney Blickson, at a convivial gathering held that same afternoon, to celebrate the above recorded triumph of Astræa. The festal party had been convoked at the Wheatsheaf Tavern in Perliton Square, and had taken the best room in the house, looking out of two windows upon that noble parallelogram, which Perliton never failed to bring with it, orally, when it condescended to visit Perlycross. The party had no idea of being too abstemious, the object of its existence being the promotion, as well as the assertion, of the liberty of the subject.

Six individuals were combining for this lofty purpose, to wit the two gentlemen so unjustly charged, and their shrewd ally of high artistic standing, that very able lawyer who had vindicated right; also Captain Timberlegs, and Horatio Peckover, Esquire; and pleasant it is as well as strange to add, Master Joseph Crang of Susscot, blacksmith, farrier, and engineer. For now little differences of opinion, charges of perjury and body-snatching, assault and battery, and general malfeasance, were sunk in the large liberality of success, the plenitude of John Barleycorn, and the congeniality of cordials.

That a stripling like the Hopper should be present was a proof of some failure of discretion upon his part, for which he atoned by a tremendous imposition; while

the prudent Pike, and the modest Mopuss, had refused with short gratitude this banquet, and gone home. But the Hopper regarded himself as a witness—although he had not been called upon—in right of his researches at Blackmarsh, and declared that officially he must hear the matter out, for an explanation had been promised. The greater marvel was perhaps that Joe Crang should be there, after all the lash of tongue inflicted on him. But when their Worships were out of sight, Blickson had taken him by the hand, in a truly handsome manner, and assured him of the deep respect he felt, and ardent admiration, at his too transparent truthfulness. Joe Crang, whose heart was very sore, had shed a tear at this touching tribute, and was fain to admit, when the lawyer put it so, that he was compelled in his own art to strike the finest metal the hardest.

So now all six were in very sweet accord, having dined well, and now refining the firmer substances into the genial flow. Attorney Blickson was in the chair, for which nature had well qualified him; and perhaps in the present more ethereal age, he might have presided in a “syndicate” producing bubbles of gold and purple, subsiding into a bluer tone.

For this was a man of quick natural parts, and gifted in many ways for his profession. Every one said that he should have been a Barrister; for his character would not have mattered so much, when he went from one town to another, and above all to such a place as London, where they think but little of it. If he could only stay sober, and avoid promiscuous company, and make up his mind to keep his hand out of quiet people’s pockets, and do a few other respectable things, there

was no earthly reason that any one could see, why he should not achieve fifty guineas a day, and even be a match for Mopuss K. C., the father of Mr. Penniloe's fattest pupil.

"This honourable company has a duty now before it;" Mr. Blickson drew attention by rapping on the table, and then leaning back in his chair, with a long pipe rested on a bowl of punch, or rather nothing but a punch-bowl now. On his right hand sat Herniman, the giver of the feast—or the lender at least, till prize-money came to fist—and on the other side was Tremlett, held down by heavy nature from the higher flights of Bacchus, because no bowl was big enough to make him drunk; "yes, a duty, gentlemen, which I, as the representative of Law cannot see neglected. We have all enjoyed one another's 'good health,' in the way in which it concerns us most; we have also promoted, by such prayers, the weal of the good Squire Mockham, and that of another gentleman, who presented himself as *Amicus curiæ*—gentlemen, excuse a sample of my native tongue—a little prematurely perhaps last night, and left us to sigh for him vainly to-day. I refer to the gentleman, with whom another, happily now present, and the soul of our party, and rejoicing equally in the Scriptural name of James, was identified in an early stage of this still mysterious history, by one of the most conscientious, truthful and self-possessed of all witnesses, I have ever had the honour yet of handling in the box. At least he was not in the box, because there was none; but he fully deserves to be kept in a box. I am sorry to see you smile—at my prolixity I fear; therefore I will relieve you of it. Action is always more urgent than words.

Duty demands that we should have this bowl refilled. Pleasure, which is the fairer sex of duty, as every noble sailor knows too well, awaits us next in one of her most tempting forms, as an ancient Poet has observed. If it is sweet to witness from the shore the travail of another, how much sweeter to have his trials brought before us over the flowing bowl, while we rejoice in his success and share it. Gentlemen, I call upon Captain Richard Herniman for his promised narrative of that great expedition, which by some confusion of the public mind has become connected with a darker enterprise. Captain Richard Herniman to the fore!"

"Bain't no Cappen, and han't got no big words," said Timber-leg'd Dick, getting up with a rattle, and standing very staunchly; "but can't refuse this here gentleman, under the circumstances. And every word as I says will be true."

After this left-handed compliment, received with a cheer in which the lawyer joined, the ancient salt premised that among good friends, he relied on honour bright, that there should be no dirty turn. To this all pledged themselves most freely; and he trusting rather in his own reservations than their pledge, that no harm should ever come of it, shortly told his story, which in substance was as follows. But some names which he omitted have been filled in, now that all fear of enquiry is over.

In the previous September, when the nights were growing long, a successful run across the Channel had been followed by a peaceful, and well-conducted, landing at a lonely spot on the Devonshire coast, where that pretty stream the Otter flows into the sea. That part

of the shore was very slackly guarded then; and none of the authorities got scent, while scent was hot, of this cordial international transaction. Some of these genuine wares found a home promptly and pleasantly in the neighbourhood, among farmers, tradesmen, squires, and others, including even some loyal rectors, and zealous Justices of the Peace, or peradventure their wives and daughters capable of minding their own keys. Some, after dwelling in caves, or furze-ricks, barns, potato-buries, or hollow trees, went inland, or to Sidmouth, or Seaton, or anywhere else where a good tax-payer had plastered up his windows, or put "Dairy" on the top of them.

But the prime of the cargo, and the very choicest goods, such as fine Cognac, rich silk and rare lace, too good for pedlars, and too dear for Country parsons, still remained stored away very snugly, in some old dry cellars beneath the courtyard of a ruined house at Budleigh; where nobody cared to go poking about, because the old gentleman who lived there once had been murdered nearly thirty years ago, for informing against smugglers, and was believed to be in the habit of walking there now. These shrewd men perceived how just it was that he should stand guard in the spirit over that which in the flesh he had betrayed, especially as his treason had been caused by dissatisfaction with his share in a very fine contraband venture. Much was now committed to his posthumous sense of honour; for the free-traders vowed that they could make a thousand pounds of these choice wares in any wealthy town, like Bath, or Bristol, or even Weymouth, then more fashionable than it is now.

But suddenly their bright hopes were dashed. In-

stead of reflecting on the value of these goods, they were forced to take hasty measures for their safety. A very bustling man, of a strange suspicious turn, as dry as a mull of snuff, and as rough as a nutmeg-grater; in a word a Scotchman out of sympathy with the natives, was appointed to the station at Sidmouth, and before he unpacked his clothes began to rout about, like a dog who has been trained to hunt for morels. Very soon he came across some elegant French work, in cottages, or fishers' huts, or on the necks of milkmaids; and nothing would content him until he had discovered, even by such deep intriguery as the distribution of lollipops, the history of the recent enterprise.

"Let bygones be bygones," would have been the Christian sentiment of any new-comer at all connected with the district; and Sandy MacSpudder must have known quite well, that his curiosity was in the worst of taste, and the result too likely to cast discredit on his own predecessor, who was threatening to leave the world just then, with a large family unprovided for. Yet such was this Scotchman's pertinacity and push, that even the little quiet village of Budleigh, which has nothing to do but to listen to its own brook prattling to the gently smiling valley, even this rose-fringed couch of peace was ripped up by the slashing of this rude Lieutenant's cutlass. A spectre, even of the best Devonian antecedents, was of less account than a scare-crow to this matter-of-fact Lowlander. "A' can smell a rat in that ghostie," was his profane conclusion.

This put the spirited free-traders on their mettle. Fifty years ago, that Scotch interloper would have learned the restful qualities of a greener sod than his. But it

is of interest to observe how the English nature softened, when the martial age had lapsed. It scarcely occurred to this gentler generation, that a bullet from behind a rock would send this spry enquirer to solve larger questions on his own account. Savage brutality had less example now.

The only thing therefore was to over-reach this man. He was watching all the roads along the coast, to east and west; but to guard all the tangles of the inward roads, and the blessed complexity of Devonshire lanes would have needed an army of pure natives. Whereas this busy foreigner placed no faith in any man born in that part of the world—such was his judgment—and had called for a draft of fellows having different vowels.

This being so, it served him right to be largely outwitted by the thick-heads he despised. And he had made such a fuss about it, at head-quarters, and promised such wonders if the case were left to him, that when he captured nothing but a string of worn-out kegs filled with diluted sheep-wash, he not only suffered for a week from gastric troubles—through his noseless hurry to identify Cognac—but also received a stinging reprimand, and an order for removal to a very rugged coast, where he might be more at home with the language and the manners. And his predecessor's son obtained that sunny situation. Thus is zeal rewarded always, when it does not win the seal.

None will be surprised to hear that the simple yet masterly stratagem, by means of which the fair western county vindicated its commercial rights against northern arrogance and ignoble arts, was the invention of a British Tar, an old Agamemnon, a true heart of oak, re-

membered also in the same fine material. The lessons of Nelson had not been thrown away; this humble follower of that great hero first misled the adversary, and then broke his line. Invested as he was by superior forces seeking access even to his arsenal, he despatched to the eastward a lumbering craft, better known to landsmen as a waggon, heavily laden with straw newly threshed, under which was stowed a tier of ancient kegs, which had undergone too many sinkings in the sea (when a landing proved unsafe) to be trusted any more with fine contents. Therefore they now contained sheep-wash, diluted from the brook to the complexion of old brandy. In the loading of this waggon special mystery was observed, which did not escape the vigilance of the keen lieutenant's watchmen. With a pair of good farm-horses, and a farm-lad on the ridge of the load, and a heavy fellow whistling not too loudly on the lade-rail, this harmless car of fictitious Bacchus, crowned by effete Ceres, wended its rustic way towards the lowest bridge of Otter, a classic and idyllic stream. These two men, of pastoral strain and richest breadth of language, carried orders of a simplicity almost equal to their own.

No sooner was this waggon lost to sight and hearing in the thick October night, and the spies sped away by the short cuts to report it, than a long light cart, with a strong out-stepping horse, came down the wooded valley to the ghostly court. In half an hour, it was packed, and started inland, passing the birthplace of a very great man, straight away to Farringdon and Rockbear, with orders to put up at Clist Hidon before daylight, where lived a farmer who would harbour them securely. On the following night they were to make

their way, after shunning Cullompton, to the shelter in Blackmarsh, where they would be safe from all intrusion, and might await fresh instructions, which would take them probably towards Bridgwater, and Bristol. By friendly ministrations of the Whetstone men, who had some experience in trade of this description, all this was managed with the best success; Jem Kettel knew the country roads, by dark as well as daylight, and Harvey Tremlett was not a man to be collared very easily. In fact, without that sad mishap to their very willing and active nag, they might have fared through Perlycross, as they had through other villages, where people wooed the early pillow, without a trace or dream of any secret treasure passing.

Meanwhile at Sidmouth the clever Scotchman was enjoying his own acuteness. He allowed that slowly rolling waggon of the Eleusine dame to proceed some miles upon its course, before his men stood at the horses' heads. There was wisdom in this, as well as pleasure—the joy a cat prolongs with mouse—inasmuch as all these good things were approaching his own den of spoil. When the Scotchmen challenged the Devonshire swains, with flourish of iron, and of language even harder, an interpreter was sorely needed. Not a word could the Northmen understand that came from the broad soft Southron tongues; while the Devonshire men feigning, as they were bidden, to take them for highwaymen, feigned also not to know a syllable of what they said.

This led, as it was meant to do, to very lavish waste of time, and increment of trouble. The carters instead of lending hand for the unloading of their waggon, sadly

delayed that operation, by shouting out "thaves!" at the top of their voice, tickling their horses into a wild start now and then, and rolling the Preventive men off at the tail. MacSpudder himself had a narrow escape; for just when he chanced to be between two wheels, both of them set off, without a word of notice; and if he had possessed at all a western body, it would have been run over. Being made of corkscrew metal by hereditary right, he wriggled out as sound as ever; and looked forward all the more to the solace underlying this reluctant pile, as dry as any of his own components.

Nothing but his own grunts can properly express the fattening of his self-esteem (the whole of which was homefed) when his men, without a fork—for the Boreal mind had never thought of that—but with a great many chops of knuckles (for the skin of straw is tougher than a Scotchman's) found their way at midnight, like a puzzled troop of divers, into the reef at bottom of the sheefy billows. Their throats were in a husky state, from chaff too penetrative, and barn-dust over volatile, and they risked their pulmonary weal, by opening a too sanguine cheer.

"Duty compels us to test the staple;" the Officer in command decreed; and many mouths gaped round the glow of his bullseye. "Don't 'ee titch none of that their wassh!" The benevolent Devonians exclaimed in vain. Want of faith prevailed; every man suspected the verdict of his predecessor, and even his own at first swallow. If timber-leg'd Dick could have timed the issue, what a landing he might have made! For the Coast-guard tested staple so that twenty miles of coast were left free for fifty hours.

Having told these things in his gravest manner, Herniman, who so well combined the arts of peace and war, filled another pipe, and was open to enquiry. Everybody accepted his narrative with pleasure, and heartily wished him another such a chance of directing fair merchandise along the lanes of luck. The blacksmith alone had some qualms of conscience, for apparent back-slidings from the true faith of free-trade. But they clapped him on the back, and he promised with a gulp, that he never would peep into a Liberal Van again.

"There is one thing not quite clear to me;" said the Hopper, when the man of iron was settled below the table, whereas the youth had kept himself in trim for steeple-chasing. "What could our friend have seen in that vehicle of free-trade, to make him give that horrible account of its contents? And again, why did Mr. Harvey Tremlett carry off that tool of his, which I found in the water?"

With a wave of his hand—for his tongue had now lost, by one of nature's finest arrangements, the exuberance of the morning, whereas a man of sober silence would now have gushed into bright eloquence—the chairman deputed to Herniman, and Tremlett, the honour of replying to the Hopper.

"You see, sir," said the former, "it was just like this. We was hurried so in stowing cargo, that some of the finest laces in the world, such as they call *Valentines*, worth maybe fifty or a hundred pounds a yard, was shot into the hold anyhow, among a lot of silks and so on. Harvey, and Jemmy, was on honour to deliver goods as they received them; blacksmith seed some of this lace a'flappin' under black tarporly; and he knowed

as your poor Squire had been figged out for 's last voyage with same sort of stuff, only not so good. A clever old 'ooman maketh some, to Perlycrass; Honiton lace they calls it here. What could a' think but that Squire was there? Reckon, Master Crang would a' told 'e this, if so be a' hadn't had a little drap too much."

"Thou bee'st a liar. Han't had half enough, I tell 'e." The blacksmith from under the table replied, and then rolled away into a bellowsful of snores.

"To be sure!" said Peckover. "I see now. Tamsin Tamlin's work it was. Sergeant Jakes told me all about it. With all the talk there had been of robbing graves, and two men keeping in the dark so, no wonder Crang thought what he did. Many people went to see that lace, I heard; and they said it was too good to go underground; though nothing could be too good for the Squire. Well now, about that other thing—why did Mr. Tremlett make off with *little Billy*?"

"Can't tell 'e, sir, very much about 'un;" the wrestler answered, with a laugh at the boy's examination. "Happen I tuk 'un up, a'veelin' of 'un, to frighten blacksmith maybe; and then I vancied a' maight come handy like, if nag's foot went wrong again. Then when nag gooed on all right, I just chucked 'un into a pool of watter, for to kape 'un out o' sight of twisty volk. Ort more to zatisfy this yung gent?"

"Yes. I am a twisty folk, I suppose. Unless there is any objection, I should like very much to know why Dr. Fox was sent on that fool's errand to the pits."

"Oh, I can tell 'e that, sir," replied Jem Kettel, for the spirit of the lad, and his interest in their doings, had made him a favourite with the present company.

"It were one of my mates as took too much trouble. He were appointed to meet us at the cornder of the four roads, an hour afore that or more; and he got in a bit of a skear, it seems not knowing why we was so behindhand. But he knowed Dr. Vox, and thought 'un better out o' way, being such a sharp chap, and likely to turn meddlesome. He didn't want 'un to hang about up street, as a' maight with some sick 'ooman, and so he zent un' t'other road, to tend a little haxident. Wouldn't do he no harm, a' thought, and might zave us some bother. But, Lord! if us could have only knowed the toorn your volk would putt on it, I reckon us should have roared and roared, all droo the strates of Perlycrass. Vainest joke as ever coom to my hearin', or ever wull, however long the Lord kapeth me a'livin.' And to think of Jem Kettel being sworn to for a learned Doctor! Never had no teethache I han't, since the day I heered on it." A hearty laugh was held to be a sovereign cure for toothache then, and perhaps would be so still, if the patient could accomplish it.

"Well, so far as that goes, you have certainly got the laugh of us;" Master Peckover admitted, not forgetting that he himself came in for as much as any one. "But come now, as you are so sharp, just give me your good opinion. And you being all along the roads that night, ought to have seen something. Who were the real people in that horrid business?"

"The Lord in heaven knoweth, sir;" said Tremlett very solemnly. "Us passed in front of Perlycrass church, about dree o'clock of the morning. Nort were doing then, or us could scarcely have helped hearing of it. Even if 'em heered our wheels, and so got out of sight,

I reckon, us must a' seed the earth-heap, though moon were gone a good bit afore that. And zim'th there waz no harse there. A harse will sing out a'most always to another harse at night, when a' heareth of him coming, and a' standeth lonely. Us coom athert ne'er chick nor cheeld from Perlycrass to Blackmarsh. As to us and Clam-pit volk, zoonder would us goo to gallows than have ort to say to grave-work. And gallows be too good for 'un, accardin' my opinion. But gen'lemen, afore us parts, I wants to drink the good health of the best man I've a knowed on airth. Bain't saying much perhaps, for my ways hath been crooked like. But maketh any kearless chap belave in good above 'un, when a hap'th acrass a man as thinketh nort of his own zell, but gi'eth his life to other volk. God bless Passon Penniloe!"

CHAPTER XV.

NEEDFUL RETURNS.

Now it happened that none of these people, thus rejoicing in the liberty of the subject, had heard of the very sad state of things, mainly caused by their own acts, and now prevailing at *Old Barn*. Tremlett knew that he had struck a vicious blow, at the head of a man who had grappled him, but he thought he had missed it and struck something else, a bag, or a hat, or he knew not what, in the pell-mell scuffle and the darkness. His turn of mind did not incline him to be by any means particular as to his conduct, in a hot and hard personal encounter; but knowing his vast strength he generally abstained from the use of heavy

weapons, while his temper was his own. But in this hot struggle, he had met with a mutually shattering blow from a staff, as straight as need be upon his right-hand knuckles; and the pain from this, coupled with the wrath aroused at the access of volunteer enemies, had carried him—like the raging elements outside—out of all remembrance of the true “sacredness of humanity.” He struck out, with a sense of not doing the right thing, which is always strengthened afterwards; and his better stars being ablink in the gale, and the other man’s gone into the milky way, he hit him too hard; which is a not uncommon error.

Many might have reasoned (and before all others, Harvey Tremlett’s wife, if still within this world of reason; and a bad job it was for him that she was now outside it) that nothing could be nobler, taking people as we find them—and how else can we get the time to take them?—than the behaviour of this champion wrestler. But, without going into such sweet logic of affinity, and rhetoric of friends (whose minds have been made up in front of it) there was this crushing fact to meet, that an innocent man’s better arm was in a smash.

No milder word, however medical, is fit to apply to Frank Gilham’s poor fore-arm. They might call it the *ulna*—for a bit of Latin is a solace, to the man who feels the pain in a brother Christian’s member—and they might enter nobly into fine nerves of anatomy; but the one-sided difficulty still was there—they had got to talk about it; he had got to bear it.

Not that he made any coward outcry of it. A truer test of manliness (as has been often said, by those who have been through either trial), truer than the rush

of blood and reckless dash of battle, is the calm, open-eyed, and firm-fibred endurance of long, ever-grinding, never-graduating pain. The pain that has no pang, or paroxysm, no generosity to make one cry out "Well done!" to it, and be thankful to the Lord that it must have done its worst; but a fluid that keeps up a slow boil, by day and night, and never lifts the pot-lid, and never whirls about, but keeps up a steady stew of flesh, and bone, and marrow.

"I fear there is nothing for it, but to have it off," Dr. Gronow said, upon the third day of this frightful anguish. He had scarcely left the patient for an hour at a time; and if he had done harsh things in his better days, no one would believe it of him, who could see him now. "It was my advice at first, you know; but you would not have it, Jemmy. You are more of a surgeon than I am. But I doubt whether you should risk his life, like this."

"I am still in hopes of saving it. But you see how little I can do," replied Fox, whose voice was very low, for he was suffering still from that terrible concussion, and but for the urgency of Gilham's case, he would now have been doctoring the one who pays the worst for it. "If I had my proper touch, and strength of nerve, I never should have let it come to this. There is a vile bit of splinter that won't come in, and I am not firm enough to make it. I wish I had left it to you, as you offered. After all, you know much more than we do."

"No, my dear boy. It is your special line. Such a case as Lady Waldron's I might be more at home with. I should have had the arm off long ago. But

the mother—the mother is such a piteous creature? What has become of all my nerve? I am quite convinced that fly-fishing makes a man too gentle. I cannot stand half the things I once thought nothing of. By-the-by, couldn't you counteract her? You know the old proverb—

‘One woman rules the men;
Two makes them think again.’

It would be the best thing you could do.”

“I don't see exactly what you mean,” answered Jemmy, who had lost nearly all of his sprightliness.

“Plainer than a pikestaff. Send for your sister. You owe it to yourself, and her; and most of all to the man who has placed his life in peril, to save yours. It is not a time to be too finical.”

“I have thought of it once or twice. She would be of the greatest service now. But I don't much like to ask her. Most likely she would refuse to come, after the way in which I packed her off.”

“My dear young friend,” said Dr. Gronow, looking at him steadfastly, “if that is all you have to say, you don't deserve a wife at all worthy of the name. In the first place, you won't sink your own little pride; and in the next, you have no idea what a woman is.”

“Young Farrant is the most obliging fellow in the world,” replied Fox, after thinking for a minute. “I will put him on my young mare *Perle*, who knows the way; and he'll be at Foxden before dark. If Chris likes to come, she can be here well enough, by twelve or one o'clock to-morrow.”

“Like, or no like, I'll answer for her coming; and

I'll answer for her not being very long about it," said the senior doctor; and on both points he was right.

Christie was not like herself, when she arrived, but pale, and timid, and trembling. Her brother had not mentioned Frank in his letter, doubting the turn she might take about it, and preferring that she should come to see to himself, which was her foremost duty. But young Mr. Farrant, the Churchwarden's son, and pretty Minnie's brother, had no embargo laid upon his tongue; and had there been fifty, what could they have availed to debar such a clever young lady? She had cried herself to sleep, when she knew all, and dreamed it a thousand times worse than it was.

Now she stood in the porch of the *Old Barn*, striving, and sternly determined to show herself rational, true to relationship, sisterly, and nothing more. But her white lips, quick breath, and quivering eyelids, were not altogether consistent with that. Instead of amazement, when Mrs. Gilham came to meet her, and no Jemmy, she did not even feign to be surprised, but fell into the bell-sleeves (which were fine things for embracing) and let the deep throbs of her heart disclose a tale that is better felt than told.

"My dearie," said the mother, as she laid the damask cheek against the wrinkled one, and stroked the bright hair with the palm of her hand, "don't 'e give way, that's a darling child. It will all be so different now you are come. It was what I was longing for, day and night, but could not bring myself to ask. And I felt so sure in my heart, my dear, how sorry you would be for him."

"I should think so. I can't tell you. And all done

for Jemmy, who was so ungrateful! My brother would be dead, if your son was like him. There has never been anything half so noble, in all the history of the world."

"My dear, you say that, because you think well of our Frankie—I have not called him that, since Tuesday now. But you do think well of him, don't you now?"

"Don't talk to me of thinking well indeed! I never can endure those weak expressions. When I like people, I do like them."

"My dear, it reminds me quite of our own country, to hear you speak out so hearty. None of them do it up your way, much; according to what I hear of them. I feel it so kind of you, to like Frank Gilham."

"Well! am I never to be understood? Is there no meaning in the English language? I don't like him only. But with all my heart, I love him."

"He won't care if doctors cut his arm off now, if he hath one left to go round you."

The mother sobbed a little, with second fiddle in full view; but being still a mother, wiped her eyes, and smiled with content at the inevitable thing.

"One thing remember," said the girl, with a coaxing domestic smile, and yet a lot of sparkle in her eyes; "if you ever tell him what you twisted out of me, in a manner which I may call—well, too circumstantial—I am afraid that I never should forgive you. I am awfully proud, and I can be tremendous. Perhaps he would not even care to hear it. And then what would become of me? Can you tell me that?"

"My dear, you know better. You know, as well as I do, that ever since he saw you, he has thought of

nothing else. It has made me feel ashamed, that I should have a son capable of throwing over all the world beside——”

“But don’t you see, that is the very thing I like? Noble as he is, if it were not for that, I—well, I won’t go into it; but you ought to understand. He can’t think half so much of me, as I do of him.”

“Then there is a pair of you. And the Lord has made you so. But never fear, my pretty. Not a whisper shall he have. You shall tell him all about it, with your own sweet lips.”

“As if I could do that indeed! Why, Mrs. Gilham, was that what you used to do, when you were young? I thought people were ever so much more particular in those days.”

“I can hardly tell, my dear. Sometimes I quite forget, because it seems so long ago; and at other times I’m not fit to describe it, because I am doing it over again. But for pretty behaviour, and nice ways—nice people have them in every generation; and you may take place with the best of them. But we are talking, as if nothing was the matter. And you have never asked even how we are going on!”

“Because I know all about it, from the best authority. Coming up the hill we met Dr. Gronow, and I stopped the chaise to have a talk with him. He does not think the arm will ever be much good again; but he leaves it to younger men, to be certain about anything. That was meant for Jemmy, I suppose. He would rather have the pain, than not, he says; meaning of course in the patient—not himself. It shows healthy action—though I can’t see how—and just the proper quantity of in-

flammation, which I should have thought couldn't be too little. He has come round to Jemmy's opinion this morning, that if one—something or other—can be got to stay in its place, and not do something or other—the poor arm may be saved, after all; though never as strong as it was before. He says it must have been a frightful blow. I hope that man will be punished for it heavily."

"I hope so too, with all my heart; though I am not revengeful. Mr. Penniloe was up here yesterday, and he tried to make the best of it. I was so vexed that I told him, he would not be quite such a Christian about it perhaps, if he had the pain in his own arm. But he has made the man promise to give himself up, if your brother, or my son, require it. I was for putting him in jail at once, but the others think it better to wait a bit. But as for his promise, I wouldn't give much for that. However, men manage those things, and not women. Did the doctor say whether you might see my Frankie?"

"He said I might see Jemmy; though Jemmy is very queer. But as for Frank, if I saw him through a chink in the wall, that would be quite enough. But he must not see me, unless it was with a telescope through a two-inch door. That annoyed me rather. As if we were such babies! But he said that you were a most sensible woman, and that was the advice you gave him."

"What a story! Oh my dear, never marry a doctor—though I hope you will never have the chance—but they really don't seem to care what they say. It was just the same in my dear husband's time. Dr. Gronow said to me—'if she comes when I am out, don't let her

go near either of them. She might do a lot of mischief. She might get up an argument, or something.' And so, I said——"

"Oh, Mrs. Gilham, that is a great deal worse than telling almost any story. An argument! Do I ever argue? I had better have stayed away, if that is the way they think of me. A telescope and a two-inch door, and not be allowed perhaps to open my mouth! There is something exceedingly unjust in the opinions men entertain of women."

"Not my Frank, my dear. That is where he differs from all the other young men in the world. He has the most correct and yet exalted views; such as poets had, when there were any. If you could only hear him going on about you, before he got that wicked knock I mean, of course,—his opinions not only of your hair and face, nor even your eyes, though all perfectly true, but your mind, and your intellect, and disposition, and power of perceiving what people are, and then your conversation—almost too good for us, because of want of exercise—and then, well I really forget what came next."

"Oh, Mrs. Gilham, it is all so absurd! How could he talk such nonsense? I don't like to hear of such things; and I cannot believe there could be anything, to come next."

"Oh yes, there was, my dear, now you remind me of it. It was about the small size of your ears, and the lovely curves inside them. He had found out in some ancient work,—for I believe he could hold his own in Greek and Latin, even with Mr. Penniloe,—that a well-shaped ear is one of the rarest of all feminine perfections. That made him think no doubt of yours, for men are

quite babies when they are in love; and he found yours according to the highest standard. Men seem to make all those rules about us, simply according to their own ideas! What rules do we ever make about them?"

"I am so glad that you look at things in that way," Christie answered, with her fingers going slyly up her hair, to let her ears know what was thought of them; "because I was afraid that you were too much—well perhaps that thinking so much of your son, you might look at things one-sidedly. And yet I might have known from your unusual common sense—but I do believe Dr. Gronow is coming back; and I have not even got my cloak off! Wait a bit, till things come round a little. A telescope, and a two-inch door! One had better go about in a coal-sack, and curl-papers. Not that I ever want such things,—curves enough in my ears perhaps. But really I must make myself a little decent. They have taken my things up to my old room, I suppose. Try to keep him here, till I come back. He says that I get up arguments. Let me get up one with him."

"My orders are as stern as they are sensible;" Dr. Gronow declared, when she had returned, beautifully dressed and charming, and had thus attacked him with even more of blandishment than argument; "Your brother you may see, but not to talk much at one time to him; for his head is in a peculiar state, and he does much more than he ought to do. He insists upon doing everything, which means perpetual attention to his friend. But he does it all as if by instinct, apparently without knowing it; and that he should do it all to perfection, is a very noble proof of the thoroughness of his grounding. The old school, the old school of training—there

is nothing like it after all. Any mere sciolist, any empiric, any smatterer of the new medical course—and where would Frank Gilham's arm be now? Not in a state of lenitive pain, sanative, and in some degree encouraging, but in a condition of incipient mortification. For this is a case of compound comminuted fracture; so severe that my own conviction was—however no more of that to you two ladies. Only feel assured that no more could be done for the patient in the best hospital in London. And talking of upstart schools indeed, and new-fangled education, have you heard what the boys have done at Perlycross? I heard the noise upstairs, and I was obliged to shut the window, although it is such a soft spring-day. I was going down the hill to stop it, when I met Miss Fox. It is one of the most extraordinary jokes I ever knew.”

“Oh, do tell us. We have not heard a word about it. But I am beginning to think that this is not at all a common place. I am never surprised at anything that happens at Perlycross.” This was not a loyal speech on the part of the fair Christie.

“From what I have heard of that Moral Force-man,” Mrs. Gilham remarked, with slow shake of her head; “I fear that his system would work better in a future existence, than as we are now. From what my son told me, before his accident, I foresaw that it must lead up to something quite outrageous. Nothing ever answers long, that goes against all the wisdom of our ancestors.”

“Excuse me for a minute; I must first see how things are going on upstairs. As soon as I am at liberty, I will tell you what I saw. Though I like the march of intellect, when discipline directs it.”

Dr. Gronow, who was smiling, which he seldom was, except after whirling out a two-ounce trout, went gently upstairs and returned in a few minutes, and sat down to tell his little tale.

“Every thing there going on as well as can be. Your brother is delighted to hear that you are come. But the other patient must not hear a word about it yet. We don’t want any rapid action of the heart. Well, what the young scamps have done is just this. The new schoolmaster has abolished canes, you know, and birches, and every kind of physical compulsion. He exclaims against coercion, and pronounces that boys are to be guided by their hearts, instead of being governed by their—pardon me, a word not acknowledged in the language of these loftier days. This gentleman seems to have abolished the old system of the puerile body and mind, without putting anything of cogency in its place. He has introduced novelties, very excellent no doubt, if the boys would only take to them, with intellects as lofty as his own. But that is the very thing the boys won’t do. I am a Liberal—so far as feelings go, when not overpowered by the judgment—but I must acknowledge that the best extremes of life, the boyhood made of nature, and the age made of experience, are equally staunch in their Toryism. But this man’s great word is—Reform. As long as the boys thought it meant their benches, and expected to have soft cushions on them, they were highly pleased, and looked forward to this tribute to a part which had hitherto been anything but sacred. Their mothers too encouraged it, on account of wear and tear; but their fathers could not

see why they should sit softer at their books, than they had to do at their trenchers.

“But yesterday unluckily the whole of it came out. There arrived a great package, by old Hill the carrier, who has had his van mended that was blown over, and out rushed the boys, without asking any leave, to bring in their comfortable cushions. All they found was a great black-board, swinging on a pillar, with a socket at the back, and a staple and chain to adjust it. Toogood expected them to be in raptures, but instead of that they all went into sulks; and the little fellows would not look at it, having heard of black magic and witchcraft. Toogood called it a ‘Demonstration-table, for the exhibition of Object-lessons.’

“Mr. Penniloe, as you may suppose, had long been annoyed and unhappy about the new man’s doings, but he is not supreme in the week-day school, as he is on Sunday; and he tried to make the best of it, till the right man should come home. And I cannot believe that he went away on purpose to-day, in order to let them have it out. But the boys found out that he was going, and there is nobody else they care twopence for.

“Everybody says, except their mothers, that they must have put their heads together over-night, or how could they have acted with such unity and precision? Not only in design but in execution, the accomplished tactician stands confessed. Instead of attacking the enemy at once, when many might have hastened to his rescue, they deferred operations until to-day, and even then waited for the proper moment. They allowed him to exhaust all the best of his breath in his usual frothy

oration—for like most of such men he can spout for ever, and finds it much easier than careful teaching.

“Then as he leaned back, with pantings in his chest, and eyes turned up at his own eloquence, two of the biggest boys flung a piece of clothes-line round his arms from behind, and knotted it, while another slipped under the desk, and buckled his ankles together with a satchel-strap, before he knew what he was doing. Then as he began to shout and bellow, scarcely yet believing it, they with much panting and blowing, protrusion of tongues, and grunts of exertion, some working at his legs, and some shouldering at his loins, and others hauling on the clothes-line, but all with perfect harmony of action, fetched their preceptor to the Demonstration-board, and laying him with his back flat against it, strapped his feet to the pedestal; then pulling out the staple till the board was perpendicular, they secured his coat-collar to the shaft above it, and there he was—as upright as need be, but without the power to move, except at his own momentous peril. Then to make quite sure of him, a clever little fellow got upon a stool, and drew back his hair, bright red, and worn long like a woman’s, and tied it with a book-tape behind the pillar. You may imagine how the poor preceptor looks. Any effort of his to release himself will crush him beneath the great Demonstration, like a mouse in a figure-of-four trap.”

“But are we to believe, Dr. Gronow,” asked Christie, “that you came away, and left the poor man in that helpless state?”

“Undoubtedly I did. It is no concern of mine. And the boys had only just got their pea-shooters. He

has not had half enough to cure him yet. Besides, they had my promise; for the boys have got the keys, they are charging a penny for a view of this Reformer; but they won't let any one in without a promise of strict neutrality. I gave a shilling, for I am sure they have deserved it. Somebody will be sure to cast him loose, in plenty of time for his own good. This will be of the greatest service to him, and cure him for a long time of big words."

"But suppose he falls forward upon his face, and the board falls upon him and suffocates him. Why, it would be the death of Mr. Penniloe. You are wanted here of course, Dr. Gronow; but I shall put my bonnet on, and rush down the hill, to the release of the Higher Education."

"Don't rush too fast, Miss Fox. There's a tree blown down across the lane, after you turn out of the one you came by. We ought to have had it cleared, but they say it will take a fortnight to make some of the main roads passable again. I would not go, if I were you. Somebody will have set him free, before you get there. I'll go out and listen. With the wind in the north, we can hear their hurrah-ing quite plainly at the gate. You can come with me, if you like."

"Oh, it is no hurrah-ing, Dr. Gronow! How can you deceive me so? It is a very sad sound indeed;" said Christie, as they stood at the gate, and she held her pretty palms to serve as funnels for her much admired ears. "It sounds like a heap of boys weeping and wailing. I fear that something sadly vindictive has been done. One never can have a bit of triumph, without that."

She scarcely knew the full truth of her own words. It was indeed an epoch of Nemesis. This fourth generation of boys in that village are beginning to be told of it, on knees that shake, with time, as well as memory. And thus it befell.

“What, lock me out of my own school-door! Can’t come in, without I pay a penny! May do in Spain; but won’t do here.”

A strong foot was thrust into the double of the door, a rattle of the handle ran up the lock and timber, and conscience made a coward of the boy that took the pennies. An Odic Force, as the present quaky period calls it, permeated doubtless from the Master hand. Back went the boy, and across him strode a man, rather tall, wiry, torve of aspect, hyporrhined with a terse moustache, hatted with a vast sombrero. At a glance he had the whole situation in his eye, and his heart,—worst of all, in his strong right arm. He flung off a martial cloak, that might have cumbered action, stood at the end of the long desk, squared his shoulders and eyebrows, and shouted—

“Boys, here’s a noise!”

As this famous battle-cry rang through the room, every mother’s darling knew what was coming. Consternation is too weak a word. Grinning mouths fell into graves of terror, castaway pea-shooters quivered on the floor, fat legs rattled in their boots, and flew about, helter-skelter, anywhere, to save their dear foundations. Vain it was; no vanishing point could be discovered. Wisdom was come, to be justified of her children.

The schoolmaster of the ancient school marched with a grim smile to the door, locked it, and pocketed

the key. Three little fellows, untaught as yet the expediency of letting well alone, had taken the bunch of keys, and brought forth, and were riding disdainfully the three canes dormant under the new dispensation. "Bring me those implements," commanded Sergeant Jakes, "perhaps they may do—to begin with." He arranged them lovingly, and then spoke wisely.

"My dear young friends, it is very sad to find, that while I have been in foreign parts, you have not been studying discipline. The gentleman, whom you have treated thus, will join me, I trust, by the time I have done, in maintaining that I do not bear the rod in vain. Any boy who crawls under a desk may feel assured that he will get it ten times worse."

Pity draws a mourning veil, though she keeps a place to peep through, when her highly respected cousin, Justice, is thus compelled to assert herself. Enough that very few indeed of the highly cultured boys of Perlycross showed much aptitude that week for sedentary employment.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOME AND FOREIGN.

SIX weeks was the average time allowed for the voyage to and fro of the schooner *Montilla* (owned by Messrs. Besley of Exeter) from Topsham to Cadiz, or wherever it might be; and little uneasiness was ever felt, if her absence extended to even three months. For Spaniards are not in the awkward habit of cracking whips at old Time, when he is out at grass, much less of jumping at his forelock; and Iberian time is nearly

always out at grass. When a thing will not help to do itself to-day, who knows that it may not be in a kinder mood to-morrow? The spirit of worry, and unreasonable hurry, is a deadly blast to all serenity of mind and dignity of demeanour, and can be in harmony with nothing but bad weather. Thus the *Montilla's* period was a fluctuating numeral.

As yet English produce was of high repute, and the Continent had not been barb-wired by ourselves, against our fleecy merchandise. The Spaniards happened to be in the vein for working, and thus on this winter trip the good trader's hold was quickly cleared of English solids, and refilled with Spanish fluids; and so the *Montilla* was ready for voyage homeward the very day her passenger rejoined. This pleased him well, for he was anxious to get back, though not at all aware of the urgent need arising. Luckily for him and for all on board, the schooner lost a day in getting out to sea, and thus ran into the rough fringes only of the great storm that swept the English coast and channel. In fact she made good weather across the Bay of Biscay, and swang into her berth at Topsham, several days before she was counted due.

The Sergeant's first duty was, of course, to report himself at Walderscourt; and this he had done, before he made that auspicious re-entry upon his own domain. The ladies did not at all expect to see him, for days or even weeks to come, having heard nothing whatever of his doings; for the post beyond France was so uncertain then, that he went away with orders not to write.

When Jakes was shown into the room, Lady

Waldron was sitting alone, and much agitated by a letter just received from Mr. Webber, containing his opinion of all that had happened at Perlton on Wednesday. Feeling her unfitness for another trial, she sent for her daughter, before permitting the envoy to relate his news. Then she strove to look calmly at him, and to maintain her cold dignity as of yore; but the power was no longer in her. Months of miserable suspense, perpetual brooding, and want of sleep, had lowered the standard of her pride; and nothing but a burst of painful sobs saved her from a worse condition.

The Sergeant stood hesitating by the door, feeling that he had no invitation to see this, and not presuming to offer comfort. But Miss Waldron seeing the best thing to do, called him, and bade him tell his news in brief.

"May it please your ladyship," the veteran began, staring deeply into his new Spanish hat, about which he had received some compliments; "all I have to tell your ladyship is for the honour of the family. Your ladyship's brother is as innocent as I be. He hath had nought to do with any wicked doings here. He hath not got his money, but he means to have it."

"Thank God!" cried Lady Waldron, but whether about the money, or the innocence, was not clear; and then she turned away, to have things out with herself; and Jakes was sent into the next room, and sat down, thanking the crown of his hat that it covered the whole of his domestic interests.

When feminine excitement was in some degree spent, and the love of particulars (which can never long be quenched by any depth of tears), was reviving,

Sergeant Jakes was well received, and told his adventures like a veteran. A young man is apt to tell things hotly, as if nothing had ever come to pass before; but a steady-goer knows that the sun was shining, and the rain was raining, and the wind was blowing, ere he felt any one of them. Alike the whole must be cut short.

It appears that the Sergeant had a fine voyage out, and picked up a good deal of his lapsed Spanish lore, from two worthy Spanish hands among the crew. Besley of Exeter did things well—as the manner of that city is—victuals were good, and the crew right loyal, as generally happens in that case. Captain Binstock stood in awe of his elder brother, the butler, and never got out of his head its original belief that the Sergeant was his brother's schoolmaster. Against that idea chronology strove hazily, and therefore vainly. The Sergeant strode the deck with a stick he bought at Exeter, spoke of his experience in transports, regarded the masts as a pair of his own canes—in a word was master of the ship, whenever there was nothing to be done to her. A finer time he never had, for he was much too wiry to be sea-sick. All the crew liked him, whether present or absent, and never laughed at him but in the latter case. He corrected their English, when it did not suit his own, and thus created a new form of discipline. Most of this he recounted in his pungent manner, without a word of self-laudation; and it would have been a treat to Christie Fox to hear him; but his present listeners were too anxious about the result to enjoy this part of it.

Then he went to the city to which he was despatched, and presented his letters to the few he could

find entitled to receive them. The greater part were gone beyond the world of letters, for twenty-five years make a sad gap in the post. And of the three survivors, one alone cared to be troubled with the bygone days. But that one was a host in himself, a loyal retainer of the ancient family, in the time of its grandeur, and now in possession of a sinecure post, as well as a nice farm on the hills, both of which he had obtained through their influence. He was delighted to hear once more of the beautiful lady he had formerly adored. He received the Sergeant as his guest, and told him all that was known of the present state of things, concerning the young Count—as he still called him—and all that was likely to come of it.

It was true that the Count had urged his claim, and brought evidence in support of it; but at present there seemed to be very little chance of his getting the money for years to come, even if he should do so in the end; and for that he must display, as they said, fresh powers of survivorship. He had been advised to make an offer of release and quit-claim, upon receipt of the sum originally advanced without any interest; but he had answered sternly, "either I will have all, or none."

The amount was so large, that he could not expect to receive the whole immediately; and he was ready to accept it by instalments; but the authorities would not pay a penny, nor attempt an arrangement with him, for fear of admitting their liability. In a very brief, and candid, but by no means honest manner, they refused to be bound at all by the action of their fathers. When that was of no avail, because the City-tolls were in the

bond, they began to call for proof of this, and evidence of that, and set up every possible legal obstacle, hoping to exhaust the claimant's sadly dwindled revenues. Above all, they maintained that two of the lives in the assurance-deed were still subsisting although their lapse was admitted in their own minutes, and registered in the record. And it was believed that in this behalf, they were having recourse to personation.

That scandalous pretext must be demolished, before it could become of prime moment to the Count to prove the decease of his brother-in-law; and certain it was that no such dramatic incident had occurred in the City, as that which her ladyship had witnessed, by means of her imagination. With a long fight before him, and very scanty sinews of war to maintain it, the claimant had betaken himself to Madrid, where he had powerful friends, and might consult the best legal advisers. But his prospects were not encouraging; for unless he could deposit a good round sum, for expenses of process, and long enquiry, and even counterbribing, no one was likely to take up his case, so strong and so tough were the forces in possession. Rash friends went so far as to recommend him to take the bull by the horns at once, to lay forcible hands upon the City-tolls, without any order from a law-court, for the Deed was so drastic that this power was conferred; but he saw that to do this would simply be to play into the hands of the enemy. For thus he would probably find himself outlawed, or perhaps cast into prison, with the lapse of his own life imminent; for the family of the Barcas were no longer supreme in the land, as they used to be.

“Ungrateful thieves! Vile pigs of burghers!” Lady Waldron exclaimed with just indignation. “My grandfather would have strung them up with straw in their noses, and set them on fire. They sneer at the family of Barca, do they? It shall trample them underfoot. My poor brother shall have my last penny to punish them; for that I have wronged him in my heart. Ours is a noble race, and most candid. We never deign to stoop ourselves to mistrust or suspicion: I trust Master Sergeant, you have not spoken so to the worthy and loyal Diego, that my brother may ever hear of the thoughts introduced into my mind concerning him?”

“No, my lady, not a word. Everything I did, or said, was friendly, straightforward, and favourable to the honour of the family.”

“You are a brave man; you are a faithful soldier. Forget that by the force of circumstances I was compelled to have such opinions. But can you recite to me the names of the two persons, whose lives they have replenished?”

“Yes, my lady. Señor Diego wrote them down in this book on purpose. He thought that your ladyship might know something of them.”

“For one I have knowledge of everything; but the other I do not know,” Lady Waldron said, after reading the names. “This poor Señorita was one of my bridesmaids, known to me from my childhood. *La Giralda* was her name of intimacy, what you call her nickname, by reason of her stature. Her death I can prove too well, and expose any imitation. But the Spanish nation—you like them much? You find them gentle, brave,

amiable, sober, not as the English are, generous, patriotic, honourable?"

"Quite as noble and good, my lady, as we found them five and twenty years ago. And I hope that the noble Count will get his money. A bargain is a bargain—as we say here. And if they are so honourable——"

"Ah, that is quite a different thing. Inez, I must leave you. I desire some time to think. My mind is very much relieved of one part, although of another still more distressed. I request you to see to the good refreshment of this honourable and faithful soldier."

Lady Waldron acknowledged the Sergeant's low bow, with a kind inclination of her Andalusian head (which is something in the headway among the foremost) and left the room with a lighter step than her heart had allowed her for many a week.

"This will never do, Sergeant; this won't do at all," said Miss Waldron coming up to him, as soon as she had shut the door behind her lofty mother. "I know by your countenance, and the way you were standing, and the sideway you sit down again, that you have not told us everything. That is not the right way to go on, Sergeant Jakes."

"Miss Nicie!" cried Jakes, with a forlorn hope of frightening her, for she had sat upon his knee, many a time, ten or twelve years ago, craving stories of good boys and bad boys. But now the eyes, which he used to fill with any emotion he chose to call for, could produce that effect upon his own.

"Can you think that I don't understand you?" said Nicie, never releasing him from her eyes. "What was

the good of telling me all those stories, when I was a little thing, except for me to understand you? When anybody tells me a story that is true, it is no good for him to try anything else. I get so accustomed to his way, that I catch him out in a moment."

"But my dear, my dear Miss Nicie," the Sergeant looked all about, as in large appeal, instead of fixing steady gaze; "if I have told you a single word that is not as true as Gospel—may I——"

"Now don't be profane, Sergeant Jakes. That was allowed perhaps in war-time. And don't be crooked—which is even worse. I never called in question any one thing you have said. All I know is that you have stopped short. You used to do just the same with me, when things I was too young to hear came in. You are easier to read than one of your own copies. What have you kept in the background, you unfaithful soldier?"

"Oh Miss, how you do remind me of the Colonel! Not that he ever looked half as fierce. But he used to say, 'Jakes what a deep rogue you are!' meaning how deeply he could trust me, against all his enemies. But Miss, I have given my word about this."

"Then take it back, as some people do their presents. What is the good of being a deep rogue, if you can't be a shallow one? I should hope you would rather be a rogue to other people than to me. I will never speak to you again, unless you show now that you can trust me, as my dear father used to trust in you. No secrets from me, if you please."

"Well, Miss, it was for your sake, more than anybody else's. But you must promise, honour bright, not

to let her ladyship know of it; for it might be the death of her. It took me by surprise, and it hath almost knocked me over; for I never could have thought there was more troubles coming. But who do you think I ran up against, to Exeter?"

"How can I tell? Don't keep me waiting. That kind of riddle is so hateful always."

"Master Tom, Miss Nicie! Your brother, Master Tom! 'Sir Thomas Waldron' his proper name is now. You know they have got a new oil they call *gas*, to light the public places of the big towns with, and it makes everything as bright as day, and brighter than some of the days we get now. Well, I was intending to come on last night by the Bristol mail, and wait about till you was up; and as I was standing with my knapsack on my shoulder, to see her come in from Plymouth, in she comes, and a tall young man dressed all in black, gets down slowly from the roof, and stands looking about very queerly.

"'Bain't you going no further, Sir?' says the Guard to him very civil, as he locked the bags in; 'only allows us three minutes and a half,'—for the young man seemed as if he did not care what time it was.

"'No. I can't go home;' says he, as if nothing mattered to him. I was handing up my things, to get up myself, when the tone of his voice took me all of a heap.

"'What, Master Tom!' says I, going up to him.

"'Who are you?' says he. 'Master Tom, indeed!' For I had this queer sort of hat on, and cloak, like a blessed foreigner.

"Well, when I told him who I was, he did not seem

at all as he used to be, but as if I had done him a great injury; and as for his luggage, it would have gone on with the coach, if the Guard had not called out about it.

“‘Come in here;’ he says to me, as if I was a dog, him that was always so well-spoken and polite! And he turned sharp into *The Old London Inn*, leaving all his luggage on the stones outside.

“‘Private sitting-room, and four candles!’ he called out, marching up the stairs, and making me a sign to follow him. Everybody seemed to know him there, and I told them to fetch his things in.

“‘No fire! Hot enough already. Put the candles down, and go;’ said he to the waiter, and then he locked the door, and threw the key upon the table. It takes a good deal to frighten me, Miss. But I assure you I was trembling; for I never saw such a pair of eyes—not furious, but so desperate; and I should have been but a baby in his hands, for he is bigger than even his father was. Then he pulled out a newspaper, and spread it among the candles.

“‘Now, you man of Perlycross,’ he cried, ‘you that teach the boys, who are going to be grave-robbers,—is this true, or is it all a cursed lie?’ Excuse me telling you, Miss, exactly as he said it. ‘The Lord in heaven help me, I think I shall go mad, unless you can tell me it is all a wicked lie.’ Up and down the room he walked, as if the boards would sink under him; while I was at my wits’ ends, as you may well suppose, Miss.

“‘I have never heard a word of any of this, Master Tom;’ I said, as soon as I had read it; for it was all about something that came on at Perlton before the

Magistrates, last Wednesday. 'I have been away in foreign parts.'

"Miss Nicie, he changed to me from that moment. I had not said a word about how long I was away, or anything whatever to deceive him. But he looked at my hat that was lying on a chair, and my cloak that was still on my back, as much as to say—'I ought to have known it;' and then he said, 'Give me your hand, Old Jakes. I beg your pardon a thousand times. What a fool I must be, to think you would ever have allowed it!'

"This put me in a very awkward hole; for I was bound to acknowledge that I had been here, when the thing, he was so wild about, was done. But I let him go on, and have his raving out. For men are pretty much the same as boys; though expecting of their own way more, which I try to take out of the young ones. But a loud singing out, and a little bit of stamping, brings them into more sense of what they be.

"'I landed at Plymouth this morning,' he said, 'after getting a letter, which had been I don't know where, to tell me that my dear father, the best man that ever lived, was dead. I got leave immediately, and came home to comfort my mother and sister, and to attend to all that was needful. I went into the coffee-room, before the coach was ready; and taking up the papers, I find this! They talk of it, as if it was a thing well known, a case of great interest in the county; a *mystery* they call it, a very lively thing to talk about—*The great Perlycross Mystery*, in big letters, cried at every corner, made a fine joke of in every dirty pot-

house. It seems to have been going on for months. Perhaps it has killed my mother and my sister. It would soon kill me, if I were there, and could do nothing.'

"Here I found a sort of opening; for the tears rolled down his face, as he thought of you, Miss Nicie, and your dear Mamma; and the rage in his heart seemed to turn into grief, and he sat down in one of the trumpery chairs that they make nowadays, and it sprawled and squeaked under him, being such an uncommon fine young man in trouble. So I went up to him, and stood before him, and lifted his hands from his face, as I had done many's the time, when he was a little fellow, and broke his nose perhaps in his bravery. And then he looked up at me quite mild, and said—

"'I believe I am a brute, Jakes. But isn't this enough to make me one?'

"I stayed with him all night, Miss; for he would not go to bed, and he wouldn't have nothing for to eat or drink; and I was afraid to leave him so. But I got him at last to smoke a bit of my tobacco; and that seemed to make him look at things a little better. I told him all I knew, and what I had been to Spain for, and how you and her ladyship were trying bravely to bear the terrible will of the Lord; and then I coaxed him all I could, to come along of me, and help you to bear it. But he said—'I might take him for a coward, if I chose; but come to Walderscourt he wouldn't, and face his own mother and sister he couldn't, until he had cleared off this terrible disgrace.'"

"He is frightfully obstinate, he always was;" said Nicie, who had listened to this tale, with streaming eyes; "but it would be such a comfort to us both, to

have him here. What has become of him? Where is he now?"

"That is the very thing I dare not tell you, Miss; because he made me swear to keep it to myself. By good rights, I ought to have told you nothing; but you managed so to work it out of me. I would not come away from him, till I knew where he would be, because he was in such a state of mind. But I softened him down a good bit, I believe; and he might take a turn, if you were to write, imploring of him. I will take care that he gets it, for he made me promise to write, and let him know exactly how I found things here, after being away so long. But he is that bitter against this place, that it will take a deal to bring him here. You must work on his love for his mother, Miss Nicie, and his pity for the both of you. That is the only thing that touches him. And say that it is no fault of Perlycross, but strangers altogether."

"You shall have my letter before the postman comes, so that you may send it with your own. What a good friend you have been to us, dear Jakes! My mother's heart would break at last, if she knew that Tom was in England, and would not come first of all to her. I can scarcely understand it. To me it seems so unnatural."

"Well, Miss, you never can tell by yourself, how other people will take things—not even your own brother. And I think he will soon come round, Miss Nicie. According to my opinion, it was the first shock of the thing, and the way he got it, that drove him out of his mind a'most. Maybe, he judges you by himself, and fancies it would only make you worse, to see him, with

this disgrace upon him. For that's what he can't get out of his head; and it would be a terrible meeting for my lady, with all the pride she hath in him. I reckon 'tis the Spanish blood that does it; Englishman as he is, all over. But never fear, Miss Nicie; we'll fetch him here, between the two of us, afore we are much older. He hath always been loving in his nature; and love will drive the anger out."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRIDE OF LIFE.

HARVEY TREMLETT kept his promise not to leave the neighbourhood, until the result of the grievous injury done to Frank Gilham should be known. Another warrant against him might be issued for that fierce assault, and he had made up his mind to stand a trial, whatever result might come of it. What he feared most, and would have fled from, was a charge of running contraband goods, which might have destroyed a thriving trade, and sent him and his colleagues across the seas. Rough and savage as he became, (when his violent temper was provoked) and scornful of home-life and quiet labour—these and other far from exemplary traits, were mainly the result of his roving habits, and the coarse and lawless company into which he had ever fallen. And it tended little to his edification, that he exercised lordship over them, in virtue of superior strength.

But his nature was rather wild than brutal; in its depths were sparks and flashes of manly generosity, and even warmth of true affection for the few who had been

kind to him, if they took him the right way of his stubborn grain. He loved his only daughter Zip, although ashamed of showing it; and he was very proud of his lineage, and the ancient name of Tremlett. Thus Mr. Penniloe had taken unawares the straightest road to his good will, by adopting the waif as an inmate of his house, and treating her, not as a servant, but a child. That Zip should be a lady, as the daughters of that Norman race had been for generations, was the main ambition of her father's life. He had seen no possibility of it; and here was almost a surety of it, unless she herself threw away the chance.

Rather a pretty scene was toward for those who are fond of humanity, at the ruined Tremlett mill, on the morning of Saint David's day. Harvey had taken to this retreat—and a very lonely home it was—for sundry good reasons of his own; the most important of which was not entrusted even to his daughter, or the revered and beloved Parson. This was to prepare a refuge, and a store house for Free-trade, more convenient, better placed, larger, and much safer than the now notorious fastness of Blackmarsh. Here were old buildings, and mazy webs of wandering; soft cliff was handy, dark wood and rushing waters, tangled lanes, furzy corners, nooks of overhanging, depths of in-and-out hood-winks of nature, when she does not wish man to know everything about her. The solid firm, directed by Timberleg'd Dick, were prepared to pay a fine price, as for a paper mill, for this last feudal tenure of the Tremlett race.

But the last male member of that much discounted stock (or at any rate the last now producible in Court,

without criminal procedure) had refused to consider the most liberal offers, even of a fine run of Free-trade, all to himself—as still it is—for the alienation in fee-simple of this last sod of hereditament. For good consideration, he would grant a lease, which Blickson might prepare for them; but he would be—something the nadir of benediction—if he didn't knock down any man, who would try to make him rob his daughter. The league of Free-traders came into his fine feelings, and took the mills and premises, on a good elastic lease. But the landlord must put them into suitable condition.

This he was doing now, with technical experience, endeavouring at the same time to discharge some little of his new parental duties. Jem Kettel found it very hard, that though allowed to work, he was not encouraged (as he used to be) to participate in the higher moments. “You clear out, when my darter cometh. You be no fit company for she.” Jem could not see it, for he knew how good he was.

But the big man had taken a much larger turn. He was not going to alter his own course of life. That was quite good enough for him; and really in those days people heard so much of “Reform! Reform!” dinged for ever in their ears, that any one at all inclined to think for himself had a tendency towards backsliding. None the less, must he urge others to reform; as the manner has been of all ages.

Tremlett's present anxiety was to provide his daughter with good advice, and principles so exalted, that there might be no further peril of her becoming like himself. From him she was to learn the value of

proper pride and dignity, of behaving in her new position, as if she had been born to it, of remembering distant forefathers, but forgetting her present father, at any rate as an example. To this end he made her study the great ancestral Bible—not the Canonical books however, so much as the covers and fly-leaves—the wholly uninspired records of the Tremlett family. These she perused with eager eyes, thinking more highly of herself, and laying in large store of pride—a bitter stock to start with—even when the course of youth is fair.

But whether for evil or for good, it was pleasant to see the rough man sitting, this first day of the Spring-time, teaching his little daughter how sadly he and she had come down in the world. Zip had been spared from her regular lessons, by way of a treat, to dine with her father, before going—as was now arranged—to the care of a lady at Exeter. Jem Kettel had been obliged to dine upon inferior victuals, and at the less fashionable hour of eleven a.m.; for it was not to be known that he was there, lest attention should be drawn to the job they were about. Tremlett had washed himself very finely, in honour of this great occasion, and donned a new red woollen jacket, following every curve and chunk of his bulky chest and rugged arms. He had finished his dinner, and was in good spirits, with money enough from his wrestling prize to last him until the next good run, and a pipe of choice tobacco (such as could scarcely be got at Exeter), issuing soft rings of turquoise tint to the black oak beams above. The mill-wheel was gone; but the murmur of the brook, and the tinkle of the trickle from the shattered trough, and the

singing of birds in their love-time came, like the waving of a branch that sends the sunshine in.

The dark-haired child was in the window-seat, with her Sunday frock on, and her tresses ribboned back, and her knees wide apart to make a lap for the Bible, upon which her great brown eyes were fixed. Puffs of the March wind now and then came in, where the lozenges of glass were gone, and lifted loose tussocks of her untrussed hair, and set the sunshine dancing on the worn planks of the floor. But the girl was used to breezes, and her heart was in her lesson.

"Hunderds of 'em, more than all the Kings and Queens of England!" she said, with her very clear voice trembling, and her pointed fingers making hop-sotch in and out the lines of genealogy. "What can Fay Penniloe show like that? But was any of 'em Colonels, father?"

"Maight a' been, if 'em would a' comed down to it. But there wasn't no Colonels, in the old times, I've a' heered. Us was afore that sort of thing were found out."

"To be sure. I might have knowed. But was any of 'em, Sirs, the same as Sir Thomas Waldron was?"

"Scores of 'em, when they chose to come down to it. But they kept that, most ways, for the younger boys among 'em. The father of the family was bound to be a Lord."

"Oh father! Real lords? And me to have never seed one! What hath become of the laws of the land? But why bain't you a real lord, the same as they was?"

"Us never cared to keep it up," said the last of the visible Tremletts, after pondering over this difficult point. "You see, Zip, it's only the women cares for

that. 'Tis no more to a man, than the puff of this here pipe."

"But right is right, father. And it soundeth fine. Was any of them Earls, and Marquises, and Dukes, and whatever it is that comes over that?"

"They was everything they cared to be. Barons, and Counts, and Dukes, spelled the same as Ducks, and Holy Empires, and Holy Sepulkers. But do 'e, my dear, get my baccy box."

What summit of sovereignty they would have reached, if the lecture had proceeded, no one knows; for as Zip, like a Princess, was stepping in and out among the holes of the floor, with her father's tin box, the old door shook with a sharp and heavy knock; and the child with her face lit up by the glory of her birth, marched away to open it. This she accomplished with some trouble, for the timber was ponderous and rickety.

A tall young man strode in, as if the place belonged to him, and said, "I want to see Harvey Tremlett."

"Here I be. Who be you?"

The wrestler sat where he was, and did not even nod his head; for his rule was always to take people, just as they chose to take him. But the visitor cared little for his politeness, or his rudeness.

"I am Sir Thomas Waldron's son. If I came in upon you rudely, I am sorry for it. It is not what I often do. But just now I am not a bit like myself."

"Sir, I could take my oath of that; for your father was a gen'leman. Zippy, dust a cheer, my dear."

"No, young lady, you shall not touch it," said the young man, with a long stride, and a gentle bow to the comely child. "I am fitter to lift chairs than you are."

This pleased the father mightily; and he became quite gracious, when the young Sir Thomas said to him, while glancing with manifest surprise at his quick and intelligent daughter—

“Mr. Tremlett, I wish to speak to you, of a matter too sad to be talked about, in the presence of young ladies.”

This was not said by way of flattery or conciliation; for Zip, with her proud step and steadfast gaze, was of a very different type from that of the common cottage lass. She was already at the door, when her father said—

“Go you down to the brook, my dear, and see how many nestesses you can find. Then come back and say good-bye to Daddy, afore go home to Passonage. Must be back afore dark, you know.”

“What a beautiful child!” Young Waldron had been looking with amazement at her. “I know what the Tremletts used to be; but I had no idea they could be like that. I never saw such eyes in all my life.”

“Her be well enough,” replied the father shortly. “And now, sir, what is it as I can do for you? I knows zummat of the troubles on your mind; and if I can do ’e any good, I wull.”

“Two things I want of you. First, your word of honour—and I know what you Tremletts have been in better days—that you had nothing to do with that cursed and devilish crime in our churchyard.”

“Sir,” answered Tremlett, standing up for the first time in this interview, “I give you my oath by that book yon’ner that I knows nort about it. We be coom low; but us bain’t zunk to that yet.”

He met Sir Thomas Waldron, eye to eye, and the young man took his plastered hand, and knew that it was not a liar's.

"Next I want your good advice," said the visitor, sitting down by him; "and your help, if you will give it. I will not speak of money because I can see what you are. But first to follow it up, there must be money. Shall I tell you what I shall be glad to do, without risk of offending you? Very well; I don't care a fig for money, in a matter such as this. Money won't give you back your father, or your mother, or anybody, when they are gone away from you. But it may help you to do your duty to them. At present, I have no money to speak of; because I have been with my regiment, and there it goes away, like smoke. But I can get any quantity almost, by going to our lawyers. If you like, and will see to it, I will put a thousand pounds in your hands, for you to be able to work things up; and another thousand, if you make anything of it. Don't be angry with me. I don't want to bribe you. It is only for the sake of doing right. I have seen a great deal of the world. Can you ever get what is right without paying for it?"

"No, sir, you can't. And not always, if you do. But you be the right sort, and no mistake. Tell you what, Sir Thomas—I won't take a farden of your money, 'cos it would be a' robbin' of you. I han't got the brains for gooin' under folk, like. Generally they does that to me. But I know an oncommon sharp young fellow, Jemmy Kettel is his name. A chap as can goo and come fifty taimes, a'most, while I be a toornin' round wance; a' knoweth a'most every rogue for fifty

maile around. And if you like to goo so far as a ten-pun' note upon him, I'll zee that a' doth his best wi' un. But never a farden over what I said."

"I am very much obliged to you. Here it is; and another next week, if he requires it. I hate the sight of money while this thing lasts; because I know that money is at the bottom of it. Tremlett, you are a noble fellow. Your opinion is worth something. Now don't you agree with me in thinking, that after all it comes to this—everything else has been proved rubbish—the doctors are at the bottom of it?"

"Well, sir, I am afeared they be. I never knowed nort of 'em, thank the Lord. But I did hear they was oncommon greedy to cut up a poor brother of mine, as coom to trouble. I was out o' country then; or by Gosh, I wud a' found them a job or two to do at home."

The young man closed his lips, and thought. Tremlett's opinion, although of little value, was all that was needed to clench his own. "I'll go and put a stop to it at once," he muttered; and after a few more words with the wrestler, he set his long legs going rapidly, and his forehead frowning, in the direction of that Æsculapian fortress, known as the *Old Barn*.

By this time Dr. Fox was in good health again, recovering his sprightly tone of mind, and magnanimous self-confidence. His gratitude to Frank Gilham now was as keen and strong as could be wished; for the patient's calmness, and fortitude, and very fine constitution had secured his warm affection, by affording him such a field for skill, and such a signal triumph, as seldom yet have rejoiced a heart at once medical and surgical. Whenever Dr. Gronow came, and dwelling

on the ingenious structure designed and wrought by Jemmy's skill, poured forth kind approval and the precious applause of an expert, the youthful doctor's delight was like a young mother's pride in her baby. And it surged within him all the more, because he could not—as the mother does—inundate all the world with it. Wiser too than that sweet parent, he had refused most stubbornly to risk the duration of his joy, or imperil the precious subject, by any ardour of excitement or flutter of the system.

The patient lay, like a well-set specimen in the box of a naturalist, carded, and trussed, and pinned, and fibred, bound to maintain one immutable plane. His mother hovered round him with perpetual presence; as a house-martin flits round her fallen nestling, circling about that one pivot of the world, back for a twittering moment, again sweeping the air for a sip of him.

But the one he would have given all the world to have a sip of, even in a dream he must not see. Such was the stern decree of the power, even more ruthless than that to which it punctually despatches us—Æsculapius, less mansuete to human tears than Æacus. To put it more plainly, and therefore better,—Master Frank did not even know that Miss Christie was on the premises.

Christie was sitting by the window, thrown out where the barn-door used to be,—where the cart was backed up with the tithe-sheaves golden, but now the gilded pills were rolled, and the only wholesome bit of metal was the sunshine on her hair—when she saw a large figure come in at the gate (which was still of the fine agricultural sort) and a shudder ran down her shapely

back. With feminine speed of apprehension, she felt that it could be one man only, the man she had heard so much of, a monster of size and ferocity, the man who had "concussed" her brother's head, and shattered an arm of great interest to her. That she ran to the door, which was wide to let the Spring in, and clapped it to the post, speaks volumes for her courage.

"You can't come in here, Harvey Tremlett," she cried, with a little foot set, as a forlorn hope, against the bottom of the door, which (after the manner of its kind) refused to go home, when called upon; "you have done harm enough, and I am astonished that you should dare to imagine we would let you in."

"But I am not Harvey Tremlett, at all. I am only Tom Waldron. And I don't see why I should be shut out when I have done no harm."

The young lady was not to be caught with chaff. She took a little peep through the chink, having learned that art in a very sweet manner of late; and then she threw open the door, and showed herself, a fine figure of blushes.

"Miss Fox, I am sure," said the visitor, smiling and lifting his hat as he had learned to do abroad. "But I won't come in, against orders, whatever the temptation may be."

"We don't know any harm of you, and you may come in;" answered Chris, who was never long taken aback. "Your sister is a dear friend of mine. I am sorry for being so rude to you."

Waldron sat down, and was cheerful for awhile, greatly pleased with his young entertainer, and her simple account of the state of things there. But when

she enquired for his mother and sister, the cloud returned, and he meant business.

"You are likely to know more than I do," he said, "for I have not been home, and cannot go there yet. I will not trouble you with dark things—but may I have a little talk with your brother?"

Miss Fox left the room at once, and sent her brother down; and now a very strange surprise befell the sprightly doctor. Sir Thomas Waldron met him with much cordiality and warmth, for they had always been good friends, though their natures were so different; and then he delivered this fatal shot.

"I am very sorry, my dear Jemmy, but I have had to make up my mind to do a thing you won't much like. I know you have always thought a great deal of my sister, Inez; and now I am told, though I have not seen her, that you are as good as engaged to her. But you must perceive that it would never do. I could not wish for a better sort of fellow, and I have the highest opinion of you. Really I think that you would have made her as happy as the day is long, because you are so clever, and cheerful, and good-tempered, and—and in fact I may say, good all round. But you must both of you get over it. I am now the head of the family; and I don't like saying it, but I must. I cannot allow you to have Nicie; and I shall forbid Nicie to think any more of you."

"What the deuce do you mean, Tom?" asked Jemmy, scarcely believing his ears. "What's up now, in the name of goodness? What on earth have you got into your precious noddle?"

"Jemmy, my noddle—as you call it—may not be a

quarter so clever as yours; and in fact I know it is not over-bright, without having the benefit of your opinion. But for all that, it has some common sense; and it knows its own mind pretty well; and what it says, it sticks to. You are bound to take it in a friendly manner, because that is how I intend it; and you must see the good sense of it. I shall be happy and proud myself to continue our friendship. Only you must pledge your word, that you will have nothing more to say to my sister, Inez."

"But why, Tom, why?" Fox asked again, with increasing wonder. He was half inclined to laugh at the other's solemn and official style, but he saw that it would be a dangerous thing, for Waldron's colour was rising. "What objection have you discovered, or somebody else found out for you? Surely you are dreaming, Tom!"

"No, I am not. And I shall not let you. I should almost have thought that you might have known, without my having to tell you. If you think twice, you will see at once, that reason, and common sense, and justice, and knowledge of the world, and the feeling of a gentleman—all compel you to—to knock off, if I may so express it. I can only say that if you can't see it, everybody else can, at a glance."

"No doubt I am the thickest of the thick—though it may not be the general opinion. But do give me ever such a little hint, Tom; something of a twinkle in this frightful fog."

"Well, you are a doctor, aren't you now?"

"Certainly I am, and proud of it. Only wish I was a better one."

"Very well. The doctors have dug up my father. And no doctor ever shall marry his daughter."

The absurdity of this was of a very common kind, as the fallacy is of the commonest; and there was nothing very rare to laugh at. But Fox did the worst thing he could have done—he laughed till his sides were aching. Too late he perceived that he had been as scant of discretion, as the other was of logic.

"That's how you take it, is it, Sir?" young Waldron cried, ready to knock him down, if he could have done so without cowardice. "A lucky thing for you, that you are on the sick-list; or I'd soon make you laugh the other side of your mouth, you guffawing jackanapes. If you can laugh at what was done to my father, it proves that you are capable of doing it. When you have done with your idiot grin, I'll just ask you one thing—never let me set eyes on your sniggering, grinning, pill-box of a face again."

"That you may be quite sure you never shall do," answered Fox, who was ashy pale with anger; "until you have begged my pardon humbly, and owned yourself a thick-headed, hot-headed fool. I am sorry that your father should have such a ninny of a cad to come after him. Everybody acknowledges that the late Sir Thomas was a gentleman."

The present Sir Thomas would not trust himself near such a fellow for another moment, but flung out of the house without his hat; while Fox proved that he was no coward, by following, and throwing it after him. And the other young man proved the like of himself, by not turning round and smashing him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIS LAST BIVOUAC.

"HAVE I done wrong?" Young Waldron asked himself, as he strode down the hill, with his face still burning, and that muddy hat on. "Most fellows would have knocked him down. I hope that nice girl heard nothing of the row. The walls are jolly thick, that's one good thing; as thick as my poor head, I dare say. But when the fellow dared to laugh! Good Heavens, is our family reduced to that? I dare say I am a hot-headed fool, though I kept my temper wonderfully; and to tell me I am not a gentleman! Well, I don't care a rap who sees me now, for they must hear of this affair at Walderscourt. I think the best thing that I can do is to go and see old Penniloe. He is as honest as he is clear-headed. If he says I'm wrong, I'll believe it. And I'll take his advice about other things."

This was the wisest resolution of his life, inasmuch as it proved to be the happiest. Mr. Penniloe had just finished afternoon work with his pupils, and they were setting off; Pike with his rod to the long pool up the meadows, which always fished best with a cockle up it, Peckover for a long steeple-chase, and Mopuss to look for chalcedonies, and mosses, among the cleves of Hagdon Hill; for nature had nudged him into that high bliss, which a child has in routing out his father's pockets. The Parson, who felt a warm regard for a very fine specimen of hot youth, who was at once the son of his oldest friend, and his own son in literature—though Minerva sat cross-legged at that travail—he,

Mr. Penniloe, was in a gentle mood, as he seldom failed to be; moreover in a fine mood, as behoves a man who has been dealing with great authors, and walking as in a crystal world, so different from our turbid fog.

To him the young man poured forth his troubles, deeper than of certain Classic woes, too substantial to be laid by any triple cast of dust. And then he confessed his flagrant insult to a rising member of the great Profession.

"You have behaved very badly, according to your own account;" Mr. Penniloe said with much decision, knowing that his own weakness was to let people off too easily, and feeling that duty to his ancient friend compelled him to chastise his son; "but your bad behaviour to Jemmy Fox has some excuse in quick temper provoked. Your conduct towards your mother and sister is ten times worse; because it is mean."

"I don't see how you can make that out." Young Waldron would have flown into a fury with any other man who had said this. Even as it was, he stood up with a doubtful countenance, glancing at the door.

"It is mean, in this way," continued the Parson, leaving him to go, if he thought fit, "that you have thought more of yourself than them. Because it would have hurt your pride to go to them, with this wrong still unredressed, you have chosen to forget the comfort your presence must have afforded them, and the bitter pain they must feel at hearing that you have returned and avoided them. In a like case, your father would not have acted so."

Waldron sat down again, and his great frame trembled. He covered his face with his hands, and

tears shone upon his warted knuckles; for he had not yet lost all those exuberances of youth.

"I never thought of that," he muttered; "it never struck me in that way. Though Jakes said something like it. But he could not put it, as you do. I see that I have been a cad, as Jemmy Fox declared I was."

"Jemmy is older, and he should have known better than to say anything of the sort. He must have lost his temper sadly; because he could never have thought it. You have not been what he calls a cad; but in your haste and misery, you came to the wrong decision. I have spoken strongly, Tom, my boy; more strongly perhaps than I should have done. But your mother is in weak health now; and you are all in all to her."

"The best you can show me to be is a brute; and I am not sure that that is not worse than a cad. I ought to be kicked every inch of the way home; and I'll go there as fast as if I was."

"That won't do at all," replied the Curate smiling. "To go is your duty; but not to rush in like a thunderbolt, and amaze them. They have been so anxious about your return, that it must be broken very gently to them. If you wish it, and can wait a little while, I will go with you, and prepare them for it."

"Sir, if you only would—but no, I don't deserve it. It is a great deal too much to expect of you."

"What is the time? Oh, a quarter past four. At half past, I have to baptise a child well advanced in his seventh year, whose parents have made it the very greatest personal favour to me, to allow him to be 'crassed'—as they express it. And I only discovered their neglect, last week! Who am I to find fault with

any one? If you don't mind waiting for about half-an-hour, I will come back for you, and meanwhile Mrs. Muggridge will make your hat look better; Master Jemmy must have lost his temper too, I am afraid. Good-bye for the moment; unless I am punctual to the minute, I know too well what will happen—they will all be off. For they 'can't zee no vally in it,' as they say. Alas, alas, and we are wild about Missions to Hindoos, and Hottentots!"

As soon as Mr. Penniloe had left the house, the youth, who had been lowered in his own esteem, felt a very strong desire to go after him. Possibly this was increased by the sad reproachful gaze of Thyatira; who, as an old friend, longed to hear all about him, but was too well-mannered to ask questions. Cutting all consideration short—which is often the best thing to do with it—he put on his fairly re-established hat, and cared not a penny whether Mrs. Channing, the baker's wife, was taking a look into the street or not; or even Mrs. Tapscott, with the rosemary over her window.

Then he turned in at the lych-gate, thinking of the day when his father's body had lain there (as the proper thing was for a body to do) and then he stood in the churchyard, where the many ways of death divided. Three main paths, all well-gravelled, ran among those who had toddled in the time of childhood down them, with wormwood and stock-gilly flowers in their hands; and then sauntered along them, with hands in pockets, and eyes for the maidens over tombstone-heads; and then had come limping along on their staffs; and now were having all this done for them, without knowing anything about it.

None of these ways was at all to his liking. Peace—at least in death—was there, green turf and the rounded bank, gray stone, and the un-household name, to be made out by a grandchild perhaps, proud of skill in ancient letters, prouder still of a pocket-knife. What a faint scratch on soft stone! And yet the character far and away stronger than that of the lettered times that follow it.

Young Waldron was not of a morbid cast, neither was his mind introspective; as (for the good of mankind) is ordained to those who have the world before them. He turned to the right by a track across the grass, followed the bend of the churchyard wall, and fearing to go any further, lest he should stumble on his father's outraged grave, sat down upon a gap of the gray enclosure. This gap had been caused by the sweep of tempest that went up the valley at the climax of the storm. The wall, being low, had taken little harm; but the great west gable of the Abbey had been smitten, and swung on its back, as a trap-door swings upon its hinges. Thick flint structure, and time-worn mullion, massive buttress, and deep foundation, all had gone flat, and turned their fangs up, rending a chasm in the tattered earth. But this dark chasm was hidden from view, by a pile of loose rubble, and chunks of flint, that had rattled down when the gable fell, and striking the cross-wall had lodged thereon, breaking the cope in places, and hanging (with tangles of ivy, and tufts of toad-flax) over the interval of wall and ruin, as a snowdrift overhangs a ditch.

Here the young man sat down; as if any sort of place would do for him. The gap in the wall was no

matter to him, but happened to suit his downcast mood, and the misery of the moment. Here he might sit, and wait, until Mr. Penniloe had got through a job, superior to the burial-service, because no one could cut you in pieces, directly afterwards, without being hanged for it. He could see Mr. Penniloe's black stick, standing like a little Parson—for some of them are proud of such resemblance—in the great south porch of the church; and thereby he knew that he could not miss his friend. As he lifted his eyes to the ancient tower, and the black yew-tree still steadfast, and the four vanes (never of one opinion as to the direction of the wind, in anything less than half a gale), and the jackdaws come home prematurely, after digging up broad-beans, to settle their squabble about their nests; and then as he lowered his gaze to the tombstones, and the new foundation-arches, and other labours of a parish now so hateful to him—heavy depression, and crushing sense of the wrath of God against his race, fell upon his head; as the ruin behind him had fallen on its own foundations.

He felt like an old man, fain to die, when time is gone weary and empty. What was the use of wealth to him, of bodily strength, of bright ambition to make his Country proud of him, even of love of dearest friends, and wedded bliss—if such there were—and children who would honour him? All must be under one black ban of mystery insoluble; never could there be one hearty smile, one gay thought, one soft delight; but ever the view of his father's dear old figure desecrated, mangled, perhaps lectured on. He could not think twice of that, but groaned—"The Lord in Heaven be my help! The Lord deliver me from this life?"

He was all but delivered of this life—happy, or wretched—it was all but gone. For as he flung his body back, suiting the action to his agony of mind—crash went the pile of jagged flint, the hummocks of dead mortar, and the wattle of shattered ivy. He cast himself forward, just in time, as all that had carried him broke and fell, churning, and grinding, and clashing together, sending up a cloud of powdered lime.

So sudden was the rush, that his hat went with it, leaving his brown curls grimed with dust, and his head for a moment in a dazed condition, as of one who has leapt from an earthquake. He stood with his back to the wall, and the muscles of his great legs quivering, after the strain of their spring for dear life. Then scarcely yet conscious of his hair-breadth escape, he descried Mr. Penniloe coming from the porch, and hastened without thought to meet him.

“Billy-jack!” said the clergyman, smiling, yet doubtful whether he ought to smile. “They insisted on calling that child ‘Billy-jack.’ ‘William-John’ they would not hear of. I could not object, for it was too late; and there is nothing in it uncanonical. But I scarcely felt as I should have done, when I had to say—‘Billy-jack, I baptise thee,’ etc. I hope they did not do it to try me. Now the Devonshire mind is very deep and subtle; though generally supposed to be the simplest of the simple. But what has become of your hat, my dear boy? Surely Thyatira has had time enough to clean it.”

“She cleaned it beautifully. But it was waste of time. It has gone down a hole. Come, and I will show you. I wonder my head did not go with it. What a queer place this has become!”

"A hole! What hole can there be about here?" Mr. Penniloe asked, as he followed the young man. "The downfall of the Abbey has made a heap, rather than what can be called a hole. But I declare you are right! Why, I never saw this before; and I looked along here with Haddon, not more than a week ago. Don't come too near; it is safe enough for me, but you are like Neptune, a shaker of the earth. Alas for our poor ivy!"

He put on his glasses, and peered through the wall-gap, into the flint-strewn depth outside. Part of the ruins, just dislodged, had rolled into a pit, or some deep excavation; the crown of which had broken in, probably when the gable fell. The remnant of the churchyard wall was still quite sound, and evidently stood away from all that had gone on outside.

"Be thankful to God for your escape," Mr. Penniloe said, looking back at the youth. "It has indeed been a narrow one. If you had been carried down there head-foremost, even your strong frame would have been crushed like an egg-shell."

"I am not sure about that; but I don't want to try it. I think I can see a good piece of my hat; and I am not going to be done out of it. Will you be kind enough, sir, to wait, while I go round by the stile, and get in at that end? You see that it is easy to get down there; but a frightful job from this side. You won't mind waiting, will you, sir?"

"If you will take my advice," said the Curate, "you will be content to let well alone. It is the great lesson of the age. But nobody attends to it."

The young man did not attend to it; and for once

Mr. Penniloe had given bad advice; though most correct in principle, and in practice too, nine times and a half out of every ten.

"Here I am, sir. Can you see me?" Sir Thomas Waldron shouted up the hole. "It is a queer place, and no mistake. Please to stop just where you are. Then you can give me notice, if you see the ground likely to cave in. Halloa! Why, I never saw anything like it! Here's a stone arch, and a tunnel beyond it, just like what you've got at the rectory, only ever so much bigger. Looks as if the old Abbey had butted up against it, until it all got blown away. If I had got a fellow down here to help me, I believe I could get into it. But all these chunks are in the way."

"My dear young friend, it will soon be dark; and we have more important things to see to. You are not at all safe down there; if the sides fell in, you would never come out alive."

"It has cost me a hat; and I won't be done. I can't go home without a hat, till dark. I am not coming up, till I know all about it. Do oblige me, sir, by having the least little bit of patience."

Mr. Penniloe smiled. The request, as coming from such a quarter, pleased him. And presently the young man began to fling up great lumps of clotted flint, as if they were marbles, right and left.

"What a volcano you are!" cried the Parson, as the youth in the crater stopped to breathe. "It is nothing but a waste of energy. The hole won't run away, my dear Tom. You had much better leave it for the proper man to-morrow."

"Don't say that. I am the proper man." How

true his words were, he had no idea. "But I hear somebody whistling. If I had only got a fellow, to keep this stuff back, I could get on like a house on fire."

It was Pike coming back from the long pool in the meadow, with a pretty little dish of trout for supper. His whistling was fine; as a fisherman's should be, for want of something better in his mouth; and he never got over the Churchyard stile, without this little air of consolation for the ghosts.

As he topped the ridge of meadow that looks down on the river, Mr. Penniloe waved his hat to him, over the breach of the churchyard wall; and he nothing loth stuck his rod into the ground, pulled off his jacket, and went down to help.

"All clear now. We can slip in like a rabbit. But it looks uncommonly black inside, and it seems to go a long way underground;" Waldron shouted up to the clergyman. "We cannot do anything, without a light."

"I'll tell you what, sir," Pike chimed in. "This passage runs right into the church, I do believe."

"That is the very thing I have been thinking;" answered Mr. Penniloe. "I have heard of a tradition to that effect. I should like to come down, and examine it."

"Not yet, sir; if you please. There is scarcely room for three. And it would be a dangerous place for you. But if you could only give us something like a candle——"

"Oh, I know!" The sage Pike suggested, with an angler's quickness. "Ask him to throw us down one of the four torches stuck up at the lych-gate. They burn like fury; and I dare say you have got a lucifer, or a Promethean."

"Not a bad idea, Pike;" answered Mr. Penniloe. "I believe that each of them will burn for half-an-hour."

Soon he returned with the driest of them, from the iron loop under the covered space; and this took fire very heartily, being made of twisted tow soaked in resin.

"I am rather big for this job;" said Sir Thomas, as the red flame sputtered in the archway, "perhaps you would like to go first, my young friend."

"Very much obliged," replied Pike drawing back; "but I don't seem to feel myself called upon to rush into the bowels of the earth, among six centuries of ghosts. I had better stop here, perhaps, till you come back."

"Very well. At any rate hold my coat. It is bad enough; I don't want to make it worse. I shan't be long, I dare say. But I am bound to see the end of it."

Young Waldron handed his coat to Pike, and stooping his tall head with the torch well in front of him, plunged into the dark arcade. Grim shadows flitted along the roof, as the sound of his heavy steps came back; then the torchlight vanished round a bend of wall, and nothing could either be seen or heard. Mr. Penniloe, in some anxiety, leaned over the breach in the churchyard fence, striving to see what was under his feet; while Pike mustered courage to stand in the archway—which was of roughly chiselled stone—but kept himself ready for instant flight, as he drew deep breaths of excitement.

By-and-by, the torch came quivering back, throwing flits of light along the white-flint roof; and behind it a man, shaking worse than any shadow, and whiter than any torchlit chalk.

"Great God!" He cried, staggering forth, and falling with his hand on his heart against the steep side of the pit. "As sure as there is a God in heaven, I have found my father!"

"What!" cried the Parson; "Pike, see to the torch; or you'll both be on fire."

In a moment, he ran round by way of the stile, and slid into the pit, without thinking of his legs, laying hold of some long rasps of ivy. Pike very nimbly leaped up the other side; this was not the sort of hole to throw a fly in.

"Give me the torch. You stay here, Tom. You have had enough of it." Mr. Penniloe's breath was short, because of the speed he had made of it. "It is my place now. You stop here, and get the air."

"I think it is rather my place, than of any other man upon the earth. Am I afraid of my own dear dad? Follow me, and I will show him to you."

He went with a slow step, dazed out of all wonder—as a man in a dream accepts everything—down the dark passage again, and through the ice-cold air, and the shivering fire. Then he stopped suddenly, and stooped the torch, stooping his curly head in lowliness behind it; and there, as if set down by the bearers for a rest, lay a long oaken coffin.

Mr. Penniloe came to his side, and gazed. At their feet lay the good and true-hearted Colonel, or all of him left below the heaven, resting placidly, unprofaned, untouched by even the hand of time; unsullied and honourable in his death, as in his loyal and blameless life.

The clear light fell upon the diamond of glass,

(framed in the oak above his face, as was often done then for the last look of love) and it showed his white curls, and tranquil forehead, and eyelids for ever closed against all disappointment.

His son could not speak, but sobbed, and shook, with love, and reverence, and manly grief. But the clergyman, with a godly joy, and immortal faith, and heavenly hope, knelt at the foot, and lifted hands and eyes to the God of heaven.

“Behold, He hath not forsaken us! His mercy is over all His works. And his goodness is upon the children of men.”

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO FINE LESSONS.

At the *Old Barn* that afternoon, no sooner was young Sir Thomas gone, than remarkable things began to happen. As was observed in a previous case, few of us are yet so vast of mind, as to feel deeply, and fairly enjoy the justice of being served with our own sauce. Haply this is why sauce and justice are in Latin the self-same word. Few of us even are so candid, as to perceive when it comes to pass; more often is a world of difference found betwixt what we gave, and what we got.

Fox was now treated by Nicie's brother, exactly as he had treated Gilham about his sister Christie. He was not remarkably rash of mind—which was ever so much better for himself and friends—yet he was quick of perception; and when his sister came and looked at

him, and said with gentle sympathy—"Oh, Jemmy, has Sir Thomas forbidden your bans? No wonder you threw his hat at him"—it was a little more than he could do, not to grin at the force of analogy.

"He is mad." He replied, with strong decision. Yet at the twinkle of her eyes, he wondered whether she held that explanation valid, in a like case, not so very long ago.

"I have made up my mind to it altogether;" he continued, with the air magnanimous. "It is useless to strive against the force of circumstances."

"Made up your mind to give up Nicie, because her brother disapproves of it?" Christie knew well enough what he meant. But can girls be magnanimous?

"I should think not. How can you be so stupid? What has a brother's approval to do with it? Do you think I care twopence for fifty thousand brothers? Brothers are all very well in their way; but let them stick to their own business. A girl's heart is her own, I should hope; and her happiness depends on herself, not her brother. I call it a great piece of impudence, for a brother to interfere in such matters."

"Oh!" said Christie, and nothing more. Neither did she even smile; but went to the window, and smoothed her apron, the pretty one she wore, when she was mixing water-colours.

"You shall come and see him now;" said Jemmy, looking at the light that was dancing in her curls, but too lofty to suspect that inward laughter made them dance. "It can't hurt him now; and my opinion is that it might even do him a great deal of good. I'll soon have him ready, and I'll send his blessed mother to

make another saucepanful of chicken broth. And Chris, I'll give you clear decks, honour bright."

"I am quite at a loss to understand your meaning." The mendacious Christie turned round, and fixed her bright eyes upon his most grandly; as girls often do, when they tell white lies—perhaps to see how they are swallowed.

"Very well then; that is all right. It will save a lot of trouble; and perhaps it is better to leave him alone."

"There again! You never seem to understand me, Jemmy! And of course, you don't care how much it upsets a poor patient, never to see a change of faces. Of course you are very kind; and so is Dr. Gronow; and poor Mrs. Gilham is a most delightful person. Still, after being for all that time so desperately limited—that's not the word at all—I mean, so to some extent restricted, or if you prefer it prohibited, from—from any little change, any sort of variety of expressions, of surroundings, of in fact, society——"

"Ah yes, no doubt! Of etcetera, etcetera. But go you on floundering, till I come back, and perhaps then you will know what you mean. Perhaps also you would look a little more decent with your apron off," Dr. Fox suggested, with the noble rudeness so often dealt out to sisters. "Be sure you remind him that yesterday was Leap-year's day; and then perhaps you will be able to find some one to understand you."

"If that is the case, you may be quite certain that I won't go near him."

But before very long she thought better of that. Was it just to punish one for the offences of another? With a colour like the first bud of monthly rose peep-

ing through its sepals in the southern corner, she ran into the shrubbery—for there was nothing to call a garden—and gathered a little posy of Russian violets and wild primrose. Then she pulled her apron off, and had a good look at herself, and could not help knowing that she had not seen a lovelier thing for a long time; and if love would only multiply it by two,—and it generally does so by a thousand—the result would be something stupendous, ineffable, adorable.

Such thoughts are very bright and cheerful, full of glowing youth and kindness, young romance and contempt of earth. But the longer we plod on this earth, the deeper we stick into it; as must be when the foot grows heavy, having no *talaria*. Long enduring pain produces a like effect with lapse of years. The spring of the system loses coil, from being on perpetual strain; sad proverbs flock into the brain, instead of dancing verses.

Frank Gilham had been ploughed and harrowed, clod-crushed, drilled, and scarified by the most advanced, enlightened, and practical of all medical high-farmers. If ever Fox left him, to get a breath of air, Gronow came in to keep the screw on; and when they were both worn out, young Webber (who began to see how much he had to learn, and what was for his highest interest) was allowed to sit by, and do nothing. A consultation was held, whenever the time hung heavily on their hands; and Webber would have liked to say a word, if it could have been uttered without a snub. Meanwhile, Frank Gilham got the worst of it.

At last he had been allowed to leave his bed, and taste a little of the fine Spring air, flowing down from

Hagdon Hill, and bearing first waft of the furze-bloom. Haggard weariness and giddy lightness, and a vacant wondering doubt (as to who or what he was, that scarcely seemed worth puzzling out), would have proved to any one who cared to know it, that his head had lain too long in one position, and was not yet reconciled to the change. And yet it should have welcomed this relief, if virtue there be in heredity, inasmuch as this sofa came from White Post farm, and must have comforted the head of many a sick progenitor.

The globe of thought being in this state, and the arm of action crippled, the question was—would heart arise, dispense with both, and have its way?

For awhile it seemed a doubtful thing; so tedious had the conflict been, and such emptiness left behind it. The young man, after dreams most blissful, and hopes too golden to have any kin with guilt, was reduced to bare bones and plastered elbows, and knees unsafe to go down upon. But the turn of the tide of human life quivers to the influence of heaven.

In came Christie, like a flush of health, rosy with bright maidenhood; yet tremulous as a lily is, with gentle fear and tenderness. Pity is akin to love—as those who know them both, and in their larger hearts have felt them, for our smaller sakes pronounce—but when the love is far in front, and pauses at the check of pride; what chance has pride, if pity comes, and takes her mistress by the hand, and whispers—“try to comfort him?”

None can tell, who are not in the case, and those who are know little of it, how these strange things come to pass. But sure it is that they have their way. The

bashful, proud, light-hearted maiden, ready to make a joke of love, and laugh at such a fantasy, was so overwhelmed with pity, that the bashfulness forgot to blush, the pride cast down its frightened eyes, and the levity burst into tears. But of all these things she remembered none.

And forsooth they may well be considered doubtful, in common with many harder facts; because the house was turned upside down, before any more could be known of it. There was coming, and going, and stamping of feet, horses looking in at the door, and women calling out of it; and such a shouting and hurrahing, not only here but all over the village, that the Perle itself might well have stopped, like Simöis and Scamander, to ask what the fish out of water were doing. And it might have stopped long, without being much wiser; so thoroughly everybody's head was flown, and everybody's mouth filled with much more than the biggest ears found room for.

To put it in order is a hopeless job, because all order was gone to grit. But as concerns the *Old Barn* (whose thatch, being used to quiet eaves-droppings, had enough to make it stand up in sheaf again)—first dashed up a young man on horseback, (and the sympathetic nag was half mad also) the horse knocking sparks out of the ground, as if he had never heard of lucifers, and the man with his legs all out of saddle, waving a thing that looked like a letter, and shouting as if all literature were comprised in *vivâ voce*. Now this was young Farrant, the son of the Churchwarden; and really there was no excuse for him; for the Farrants are a very clever race; and as yet competitive examination had not

made the sight of paper loathsome to any mind cultivating self-respect.

"You come out, and just read this;" he shouted to the *Barn* in general. "You never heard such a thing in all your life. All the village is madder than any March hare. I shan't tell you a word of it. You come out and read. And if that doesn't fetch you out, you must be a clam of oysters. If you don't believe me, come and see it for yourselves. Only you will have to get by Jakes, and he is standing at the mouth, with his French sword drawn."

"In the name of Heaven, what the devil do you mean?" cried Fox, running out, and catching fire of like madness, of all human elements the most explosive, "and this—why, this letter is the maddest thing of all! A man who was bursting to knock me down, scarcely two gurgles of the clock ago! And now, I am his beloved Jemmy! Mrs. Gilham, do come out. Surely that chicken has been stewed to death. Oh, Ma'am, you have some sense in you. Everybody else is gone off his head. Who can make head or tail of this? Let me entreat you to read it, Mrs. Gilham. Farrant, you'll be over that colt's head directly. Mrs. Gilham, this is meant for a saner eye than mine. Your head-piece is always full of self-possession."

Highly flattered with this tribute, the old lady put on her spectacles, and read, slowly and decorously.

"BELOVED JEMMY,

"I am all that you called me, a hot-headed fool, and a cad; and everything vile on the back of it. The doctors are the finest chaps alive, because they have

never done harm to the dead. Come down at once, and put a bar across, because Jakes must have his supper. Perlycross folk are the best in the world, and the kindest-hearted, but we must not lett them go in there. I am off home, for if anybody else was to get in front of me, and tell my mother, I should go wild, and she would be quite upsett. When you have done all you think proper, come up and see poor Nicie.

“From your affectionate, and very sorry,

“T. R. WALDRON.”

“Now the other, Ma’am!” cried Doctor Fox. “Here is another from the Parson. Oh come now, we shall have a little common sense.”

“MY DEAR JEMMY,

“It has pleased the Lord, who never afflicts us without good purpose, to remove that long and very heavy trouble from us. We have found the mortal remains of my dear friend, untouched by any human hand, in a hollow way leading from the Abbey to the Church. We have not yet discovered how it happened; and I cannot stop to tell you more, for I must go at once to Walderscourt, lest rumour should get there before us; and Sir Thomas must not go alone, being of rather headlong, though very noble nature. Sergeant Jakes has been placed on guard, against any rash curiosity. I have sent for the two Churchwardens and can leave it safely to them and to you, to see that all is done properly. If it can be managed, without undue haste, the coffin should be placed inside the Church, and the doors locked until the morning. When that is

done, barricade the entrance to the tunnel; although I am sure that the people of our parish would have too much right feeling, as well as apprehension, to attempt to make their way in, after dark. To-morrow, I trust we shall offer humble thanks to the Giver of all good, for this great mercy. I propose to hold a short special service; though I fear there is no precedent in the Prayer-book. This will take a vast weight off your mind, as well as mine, which has been sorely tried. I beg you not to lose a minute, as many people might become unduly excited.

“Most truly yours,

“PHILIP PENNILOE.”

“P.S.—This relieves us also from another dark anxiety, simply explaining the downfall of the S.E. corner of the Chancel.”

“It seems hard upon me; but it must be right, because the Parson has decreed it;” Dr. Fox cried, without a particle of what is now called “slavish adulation of the Church”—which scarcely stuck up for herself in those days—but by virtue of the influence which a kind and good man always gains, when he does not overstrain his rights. “I am off, Mrs. Gilham, I can trust you to see to the pair of invalids upstairs.”

Then he jumped upon young Mr. Farrant’s horse, and leaving him to follow at foot leisure, dashed down the hill towards Perlycross. At the four cross-roads, which are the key of the position, and have all the village and the valley in command, he found as fine a concourse perhaps as had been there since the great

days of the Romans. Not a rush of dread, and doubting, and of shivering back-bones, such as had been on that hoary morning, when the sun came through the fog, and showed Churchwarden Farmer John, and Channing the clerk, and blacksmith Crang, trudging from the potato-field full of ghastly tidings, and encountering at that very spot Sergeant Jakes, and Cornish, and the tremulous tramp of half the village, afraid of resurrection.

Instead of hurrying from the churchyard, as a haunt of ghouls and fiends, all were hastening towards it now, with deep respect reviving. The people who lived beyond the bridge, and even beyond the factory, and were much inclined by local right to sit under the Dissenting minister—himself a very good man, and working in harmony with the Curate—many of these, and even some from Priestwell, having heard of it, pushed their right to know everything, in front of those who lived close to the Church and looked through the railings every day. Farmer John Horner was there on his horse, trotting slowly up and down, as brave as a mounted policeman is, and knowing every one by name called out to him to behave himself. Moreover Walter Haddon stood at the door of the *Ivy-bush*, with his coat off, and his shirtsleeves rolled, and ready to double his fist at any man who only drank small beer, at the very first sign of tumult. But candidly speaking this was needless, powerful as the upheaval was, and hot the spirit of enquiry; for the wives of most of the men were there, and happily in an English crowd that always makes for good manners.

Fox was received with loud hurrahs, and many ran

forward to shake his hand; some, who had been most black and bitter in their vile suspicions, having the manliness to beg his pardon, and abuse themselves very heartily. He forgave them with much frankness, as behoves an Englishman, and with a pleasant smile at their folly, which also is nicely national. For after all, there is no other race that can give and take as we do; not by any means headlong, yet insisting upon decision—of the other side, at any rate—and thus quickening the sense of justice upon the average, in our favour.

Fox, with the truly British face of one who is understood at last, but makes no fuss about it, gave up his horse at the lych-gate, and made off where he was beckoned for. Here were three great scaffold-poles and slings fixed over the entrance to the ancient under-way; and before dark all was managed well. And then a short procession, headed by the martial march of Jakes, conveyed into the venerable Church the mortal part of a just and kind man and a noble soldier, to be consigned to-morrow to a more secure, and ever tranquil, and still honoured resting-place.

This being done, the need of understanding must be satisfied. Dr. Fox, and Dr. Gronow, with the two Churchwardens, and Channing the clerk, descended the ladder into the hole, and with a couple of torches kindled went to see the cause and manner of this strange yet simple matter—a four-month mystery of darkness, henceforth as clear as daylight.

When they beheld it, they were surprised, not at the thing itself—for it could scarcely have happened otherwise, under the circumstances—but at the coincidences, which had led so many people of very keen intelligence

into, as might almost be said, every track, except the right one. And this brought home to them one great lesson—“*If you wish to be sure of a thing, see it with your own good eyes.*” And another—but that comes afterwards.

The passage, dug by the Monks no doubt, led from the Abbey directly westward to the chancel of the Church, probably to enable them to carry their tapers burning, and discharge their duties there promptly and with vestments dry, in defiance of the weather. The crown, of loose flints set in mortar, was some eight feet underground, and the line it took was that adopted in all Christian burial. The grave of the late Sir Thomas Waldron was prepared, as he had wished, far away from the family vault (which had sadly undermined the Church), and towards the eastern end of the yard, as yet not much inhabited. As it chanced, the bottom lay directly along a weak, or worn-out part of the concrete arch below; and the men who dug it said at the time that their spades had struck on something hard, which they took to be loose blocks of flint. However, being satisfied with their depth, and having orders to wall the bottom, they laid on either side some nine or ten courses of brickwork, well flushed in with strong and binding mortar; but the ends being safe and bricks running short, to save any further trouble, they omitted the cross-wall at the ends. Thus when the weight of earth cast in pressed more and more heavily upon the heavy coffin, the dome of concreted flints below collapsed, the solid oaken box dropped quietly to the bottom of the tunnel, and the dwarf brick sides having no tie across, but being well bonded together, and well-

footed, fell across the vacancy into one another, forming a new arch, or more correctly a splay span-roof, in lieu of the old arch which had yielded to the strain. Thus the earth above took this new bearing, and the surface of the ground was no more disturbed than it always is by settlement.

No wonder then that in the hurried search, by men who had not been down there before, and had not heard of any brickwork at the sides, and were at that moment in a highly nervous state, not only was the grave reported empty—which of course was true enough—but no suspicion was entertained that the bottom they came to (now covered with earth) was anything else than a rough platform for the resting-place. And the two who could have told them better, being proud of their skill in foundations, had joined the builders' staff, and been sent away to distant jobs.

In the heat of foregone conclusion, and the terror created by the blacksmith's tale, and the sad condition of that faithful little *Jess*, the report had been taken as final. No further quest seemed needful; and at Squire Mockham's order, the empty space had been filled in at once, for fear of the excitement, and throng of vulgar gazers, gathering and thickening around the empty grave.

Such are the cases that make us wonder at the power of co-incidence, and the very strange fact that the less things seem to have to do with one another, the greater is their force upon the human mind, when it tries to be too logical.

Many little things, all far apart, had been fetched together by fine reasoning process, and made to con-

verge towards a very fine error, with certainty universal.

Even that humble agent, or patient, little *Jess*—despised as a dog, by the many who have no delight in their better selves—had contributed very largely to the confluence of panic. If she could only have thrown the light of language on her woeful plight, the strongest clench to the blacksmith's tale would never have come near his pincers. For the slash that rewarded her true love fell, not from the spade of a Churchyard-robber, but from a poacher's billhook. This has already been intimated; and Mr. Penniloe must have learned it then; if he had simply taken time, instead of making off at five miles an hour, when Speccotty wanted to tell his tale. This should be a warning to Clergymen; for perhaps there was no other man in the parish, whose case the good parson would thus have postponed, without prospect of higher consolation. And it does seem a little too hard upon a man, that because his mind is gone astray unawares, his soul should drop out of cultivation!

That poor little spaniel was going home sadly, to get a bit of breakfast, and come back to her duty; when trespassing unwittingly upon the poacher's tricks, at early wink of daylight, she was taken for a minion of the Evil One, and met with a vigour which is shown too seldom, by even true sportsmen, to his emissaries. Perhaps before she quitted guard, she may have had a nip at the flowers on the grave, and dropped them back, when she failed to make sweet bones of them.

Without further words—though any number of words, if their weight were by the score, would be too

few—the slowest-headed man in Perlycross might lay to his heart the second lesson, read in as mild a voice as Penniloe's, above. And without a word at all, he may be trusted to go home with it; when the job is of other folk's hands, but his own pocket.

“*Never scamp your work,*” was preached more clearly by this long trouble, and degradation of an honourable parish, than if Mr. Penniloe had stood in the pulpit, for a week of Sundays, with the mouth of King Solomon laid to his ear, and the trump of the Royal Mail upon his lips.

CHAPTER XX.

AND ONE STILL FINER.

IF it be sweet to watch at ease the troubles of another, how much sweeter to look back, from the vantage ground of happiness, upon one's own misfortunes! To be able to think—“well, it was too bad! Another week would have killed me. How I pulled through it, is more than I can tell; for everybody was against me! And the luck—the luck kept playing leap-frog; fifty plagues all upon one another's back; and my poor little self at the bottom. Not a friend came near me; they were all so sorry, but happened to be frightfully down themselves. I assure you, my dear, if it had not been for you, and the thought of our blessed children, and perhaps my own—well, I won't say ‘pluck,’ but determination to go through with it; instead of arranging these flowers for dinner, you would have been wreathing them for a sadder purpose.”

The lady sheds a tear, and says—"Darling Jack, see how you have made my hand shake! I have almost spoiled that truss of Hoya, and this Schubertia won't stand up. But you never said a word about it, at the time! Was that fair to me, Jack?" And the like will come to pass again, perhaps next year, perhaps next week.

But the beauty of country-life, as it then prevailed (ere the hungry hawk of Stock-exchange poised his wings above the stock-dove) was to take things gently, softly, with a cooing faith in goodness, both above us and around. Men must work; but being born (as their best friends, the horses, are), for that especial purpose, why should they make it still more sad, by dwelling upon it, at the nose-bag time? How much wiser to allow that turbulent bit of stuff, the mind, to abide at ease, and take things in, rather than cast them forth half-chewed, in the style of our present essayists?

Now this old village was the right sort of place, to do such things, without knowing it. There was no great leading intellect (with his hands returned to feet), to beat the hollow drum, and play shrill fife, and set everybody tumbling over his best friend's head. The rule of the men was to go on, according to the way in which their fathers went; talking as if they were running on in front, but sticking effectually to the old coat-tail. Which in the long run is the wisest thing to do.

They were proud of their church, when the Sunday mood was on, and their children came home to tell about it.

There she was. Let her stand; if the folk with

money could support her. It was utterly impossible to get into their heads any difference betwixt the Church in the churchyard, and the one that inhabits the sky above. When a man has been hard at work all the week, let his wife be his better half on Sunday.

Nothing that ever can be said, or done, by the most ardent "pastor," will ever produce that enthusiasm among the tegs of his flock, which spreads so freely among the ewes, and lambs. Mr. Penniloe would not be called a *Pastor*; to him the name savoured of a cant conceit. Neither did he call himself a *Priest*, for him it was quite enough to be a Clergyman of the Church of England; and to give his life to that.

Therefore, when the time came round, and the turn of the year was fit for it, this Parson of that humbler type was happy to finish, without fuss, the works that he had undertaken, with a lofty confidence in the Lord, which had come to ground too often. His faith, though fine, had never been of that grandly abstract quality, which expects the ravens to come down, with bread instead of bills, and build a nest for sweet doves *gratis*. To pay every penny that was fairly due, and shorten no man of his Saturday wage, towards the Sunday consolation; to perceive that business must not be treated as a purely spiritual essence; and to know that a great many very good people drip away (as tallow does from its own wick) from their quick flare of promises; also to bear the brunt of all, and cast up the toppling column, with the balance coming down on his own chest—what wonder that he had scarcely any dark hair left, and even the silver was inclined to say adieu?

When a man, who is getting on in years, comes out

of a long anxiety, about money, and honour, and his sense of right, he finds even in the soft flush of relief, that a great deal of his spring is gone. A Bachelor of Arts, when his ticks have been paid by a groaning governor, is fit and fresh to start again, and seldom dwells with due remorse upon the sacrifice Vicarious. His father also, if of right paternal spirit, soars above the unpleasant subject; leaves it to the mother to drive home the lesson—which she feels already to be too severe—and says, “Well, Jack, you have got your degree; and that’s more than the Squire’s son can boast of.”

But the ancient M.A. of ten lustres, who has run into debt on his own hook, and felt the hook running into him, is in very different plight, even when he has wriggled off. Parson Penniloe was sorely humble, his placid forehead sadly wrinkled, and his kindly eyes uncertain how to look at his brother men, even from the height of pulpit; when in his tremulous throat stuck fast that stern and difficult precept—“Owe no man anything.”

Even the strongest of mankind can scarcely manage to come up to that, when fortune is not with him, and his family tug the other way. The glory of the Lord may be a lofty prospect, but becomes a cloudy pillar, when the column is cast up, and will not square with cash in hand. Scarcely is it too much to say, that since the days of Abraham, it would have been hard to find a man of stronger faith than Penniloe,—except at the times when he broke down (in vice of matters physical) and proved at one break two ancient creeds—*Exceptio probat regulam*; and *Corruptio optimi pessima*.

While he was on the balance now, as a man of the

higher ropes should be, lifting the upper end of his pole, that the glory of his parish shone again, yet feeling the butt inclined to swag, by reason of the bills stuck upon it, who should come in to the audience and audit but young Sir Thomas Waldron? This youth had thought perhaps too little of himself,—because those candid friends, his brother-boys had always spoken of his body so kindly, without a single good word for his mind—but now he was authorised, and even ordered, by universal opinion to take a much fairer view of his own value.

Nothing that ever yet came to pass has gone into words without some shift of colour, and few things even without change of form; and so it would have been beyond all nature if the events above reported had been told with perfect accuracy even here. How much less could this be so, in the hot excitement of the time, with every man eager to excel his neighbour's narrative, and every woman burning to recall it with her own pure imagination! What then of the woman, who had been blessed enough to enrich the world, and by the same gift ennoble it, with the hero, who at a stroke had purged the family, the parish, and the nation?

Nevertheless he came in gently, modestly, and with some misgivings, into the room, where he had trembled, blushed, and floundered on all fours, over the old gray Latin steps, which have broken many a knee-cap.

"If you please, sir," he said to his old tutor, who alone had taught him anything, for at Eton he had barely learned good manners; "my mother begs you to read this. And we are all ashamed of our behaviour."

"No, Tom, no. You have no cause for that. Your

mother may have been a little hard at first. But she has meant to be just throughout. The misery she has passed through—none but herself can realise.”

“You see, sir, she does not sing out about things, as most women do; and that of course makes it ever so much worse for her.”

The young man spoke like some deep student of feminine nature; but his words were only those of the good housekeeper at Walderscourt. Mr. Penniloe took them in that light, and began to read without reply.

“Truly esteemed and valued sir. With some hesitation of the mind I come to say that in all I have said and done, my mind has been of the wrong intelligence most largely. It always appears in this land of Britain, as if nobody of it could make a mistake. But we have not in my country such great wisdom and good fortune. Also in any other European land of which I have the acquaintance, the natives are wrong in their opinions sometimes.

“But this does not excuse me of my mistake. I have been unjust to you and to all people living around my place of dwelling. But by my dear son, and his very deep sagacity, it has been made manifest that your good people were considered guilty, without proper justice, of a wrong upon my husband’s memory. Also that your good church, of which he thought so well in the course of his dear life, has treated him not with ignominy, but with the best of her attention, receiving him into the sacred parts, where the Priests of our religion in the times of truth conversed. This is to me of the holiest and most gracious consolation.

“Therefore I entreat you to accept, for the uses of

so good a building, the little sum herewith committed to your care, which flows entirely from my own resources, and not from the property of my dear husband, so much engaged in the distribution of the law. When that is disengaged, my dear son Rodrigo, with my approbation will contribute from it the same amount for the perfection of the matter."

"One, two, three, four, five. And every one of them a hundred pounds! My dear Tom, I feel a doubt——"

Mr. Penniloe leaned back and thought. He was never much excited about money, except when he owed it to, or for the Lord.

"I call it very poor amends indeed. What would ten times as much be, after all that you have suffered? And how can you refuse it, when it is not for yourself? My mother will be hurt most dreadfully, and never think well again of the Church of England."

"Tom, you are right," Mr. Penniloe replied, while a smile flitted over his conscience. "I should indeed convey a false impression of the character of our dear mother. But as for the other £500—well——"

"My father's character must be considered, as well as your good mother's." Sir Thomas was not strong at metaphor. "And I am sure of one thing, sir. If he could have known what would happen about him, and how beautifully every one behaved, except his own people—but it's no use talking. If you don't take it, I shall join the Early Methodists. What do you think of that, sir? I am always as good as my word, you know."

"Ah! Ah! It may be so," the Curate answered thoughtfully, returning to the mildness of exclamation from which these troubles had driven him. "But allow

me a little time for consideration. Your mother's very generous gift, I can accept without hesitation, and have no right to do otherwise. But as to your father's estate, I am placed in a delicate position, by reason of my trusteeship; and it is possible that I might go wrong; at any rate, I must consult——"

"Mrs. Fox, sir, from Foxden!" Thyatira Muggridge cried, with her face as red as a turkey's wattle, and throwing the door of the humble back-room as wide as if it never could be wide enough. For the lady was beautifully arrayed.

"I come to consult, not to be consulted. My confidence in myself has been misplaced," said the mother of Jemmy and Christie, after making the due salutation. "Sir Thomas, I beg you not to go. You have some right to a voice in the matter; if as they tell me at *Old Barn*, you have conquered your repugnance to my son, and are ready to receive him as your brother-in-law."

"Madam, I was a fool," said Tom, offering his great hand with a sheepish look. "Your son has forgiven me; and I hope that you will. Jemmy is the finest fellow ever born."

"A credit to his mother, as his mother always thought. And what is still better for himself, a happy man, in winning the affections of the sweetest girl on earth. I have seen your dear sister—what a gentle darling!"

"Nicie is very well in her way, madam. But she has a strong will of her own. Jemmy will find that out, some day. Upon the whole, I am sorry for him."

"He talks in the very same way of his sister. If

young men listened to young men, none of them would ever marry. Oh, Mr. Penniloe, you can be trusted at any rate, to look at things from a higher point of view."

"I try sometimes; but it is not easy. And I generally get into scrapes, when I do. But I have one consolation. Nobody ever takes my advice."

"I mean to take it," Mrs. Fox replied, looking into his gentle eyes, with the faith which clever women feel in a nature larger than their own. "You need not suppose that I am impulsive. But I know what you are. When every one else in this stupid little place condemned my son, without hearing a word, there was one who was too noble, too good a Christian, to listen to any reason. He was right when the mother herself was wrong. For I don't mind telling you, as I have even told my son, that knowing what he is, I could not help suspecting that he—that he—had something to do with it. Not that Lady Waldron had any right whatever—and it will take me a long time to forgive her, and her son is quite welcome to tell her that. What you felt yourself was quite different, Sir Thomas."

"I can't see that my mother did any harm. Why, she even suspected her own twin-brother! If you were to bear ill-will against my mother——"

"Of such little tricks I am incapable, Sir Thomas. And of course I can allow for foreigners. Even twenty years of English life cannot bring them to see things as we do. Their nature is so—well, I won't say narrow. Neither will I say 'bigoted,' although——"

"We quite understand you, my dear madam." Mr. Penniloe was shocked at his own rudeness, in thus interrupting a lady, but he knew that very little more

would produce a bad breach betwixt Walderscourt and Foxden. "What a difference really does exist among people equally just and upright——"

"My dear mother is as just and upright as any English-woman in the world, Protestant or Catholic," the young man exclaimed, having temper on the bubble, yet not allowing it to boil against a lady. "But if his own mother condemned him, how—I can't put it into words, as I mean it—how can she be in a wax with my mother? And more than that—as it happens, Mrs. Fox, my mother starts for Spain to-day, and I cannot let her go alone."

"Now the Lord must have ordered it so," thought the Parson. "What a clearance of hostile elements!" But fearing that the others might not so take it, he said only—"Ah, indeed!"

"To her native land?" asked Mrs. Fox, as a Protestant not quite unbigoted; and a woman who longed to have it out. "It seems an extraordinary thing just now. But perhaps it is a pilgrimage."

"Yes, madam, for about £500,000," answered Sir Thomas, in his youthful Tory vein, not emancipated yet from disdain of commerce; "not for the sake of the money, of course; but to do justice to the brother she had wronged. Mr. Penniloe can tell you all about it. I am not much of a hand at arithmetic."

"We won't trouble any one about that now," the lady replied with some loftiness. "But I presume that Lady Waldron would wish to see me, before she leaves this country."

"Certainly she would if she had known that you were here. My sister had not come back yet, to tell

her. She will be disappointed terribly, when she hears that you have been at Perlycross. But she is compelled to catch the Packet; and I fear that I must say 'good-bye'; mother would never forgive me, if she lost her voyage through any fault of mine."

"You see how they treat us!" said Mrs. Fox of Foxden, when the young man had made his adieu with great politeness. "I suppose you understand it, Mr. Penniloe, though your mind is so very much larger?"

The clergyman scarcely knew what to say. He was not at all quick in the ways of the world; and all feminine rush was beyond him. "We must all allow for circumstances," was his quiet platitude.

"All possible allowance I can make," the lady replied with much self-command. "But I think there is nothing more despicable than this small county-family feeling! Is Lady Waldron not aware that I am connected with the very foremost of your Devonshire families? But because my husband is engaged in commerce, a military race may look down upon us! After all, I should like to know, what are your proudest landowners, but mere agriculturists by deputy? I never lose my temper; but it makes me laugh, when I remember that after all, they are simply dependent upon farming. Is not that what it comes to, Mr. Penniloe?"

"And a very noble occupation, madam. The first and the finest of the ways ordained by the Lord for the sustenance of mankind. Next to the care of the human soul, what vocation can be——"

"You think so. Then I tell you what I'll do, if only to let those Waldrons know how little we care for their prejudices. Everything depends upon me now, in my

poor husband's sad condition. I will give my consent to my daughter's alliance—great people call it *alliance*, don't they?—with a young man, who is a mere farmer!”

“I am assured that he will make his way,” Mr. Penniloe answered with some inward smile, for it is a pleasant path to follow in the track of ladies. “He gets a higher price for pigs, than either of my Churchwardens.”

“What could you desire more than that? It is a proof of the highest capacity. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Gilham shall send their wedding cards to Walderscourt, with a prime young porker engraved on them. Oh, Mr. Penniloe, I am not perfect. But I have an unusual gift perhaps of largeness of mind, and common sense; and I always go against any one, who endeavours to get the whip-hand of me. And I do believe my darling Christie gets it from her mother.”

“She is a most charming young lady, Mrs. Fox. What a treasure she would be in this parish! The other day, she said a thing about our Church——”

“Just like her. She is always doing that. And when she comes into her own money—but that is a low consideration. It is gratitude, my dear sir, the deepest and the noblest feeling that still survives in these latter days. Without that heroic young man's behaviour, which has partly disabled him for life, I fear, I should have neither son nor daughter. And you say that the Gilhams are of very good birth?”

“The true name is *Guillaume*, I believe. Their ancestor came with the Conqueror. Not as a rapacious noble, but in a most useful and peaceful vocation; in fact——”

"Quite enough, Mr. Penniloe. In such a case, one scorns particulars. My daughter was sure that it was so. But I doubted; although you can see it in his bearing. A more thoroughly modest young man never breathed; but I shall try to make him not afraid of me. He told my daughter that, in his opinion, I realised—but you would think me vain; and I was justly annoyed at such nonsense. However, since I have had your advice, I shall hesitate no longer."

Mrs. Fox smiled pleasantly, because her mind was quite made up, to save herself a world of useless trouble in this matter, and yet appear to take the upper hand in her surrender.

Wondering what advice he could have been supposed to give, the mild yet gallant Parson led her to the Foxden carriage, which had halted at his outer gate, and opposite the school house. Here with many a bow they parted, thinking well of one another, and hoping for the like regard. But as the gentle curate passed the mouth of the Tænarian tunnel leading to his lower realms, a great surprise befell him.

"What has happened? There is something wrong. Surely at this time of day, one ought to see the sunset through that hole," he communed with himself in wonder, for the dark arcade ran from east to west. "There must be a stoppage somewhere. I am almost sure I can see two heads. Good people, come out, whoever you may be."

"The fact of it is, sir," said Sergeant Jakes, marching out of the hole with great dignity, though his hat was white with cob-webs; "the fact of it is that this good lady hath received a sudden shock——"

"No sir, no sir. Not at all like that, sir. Only as

St. Paul saith in chapter 5 of Ephesians—"this is a great mystery.'"

"It is indeed. And I must request to have it explained immediately."

Thyatira's blushes and the sparkling of her eyes made her look quite pretty, and almost as good as young again, while she turned away with a final shot from the locker of old authority.

"You ought to be ashamed, sir, according to my thinking, to be standing in this wind so long, without no hat upon your head."

"You see, sir, it is just like this," the gallant sergeant followed up, when his love was out of hearing; "time hath come for Mrs. Muggridge to be married, now or never. It is not for me to say, as a man who fears the Lord, that I think He was altogether right in the institooting of wedlock, supposing as ever He did so. But whether He did it, or whether He did not, the thing hath been so taken up by the humankind—women particular—that for a man getting on in years, 'tis the only thing respectable. Thyatira hath proven that out of the Bible, many times."

"Mr. Jakes, the proper thing is to search the Scriptures for yourself."

"So Thyatira saith. But Lord! She findeth me wrong at every text, from looking up to women so. If she holdeth by St. Paul, a quarter so much as she quoteth him, there won't be another man in Perlycross with such a home as I shall have."

"You have chosen one of the few wise virgins. Jakes, I trust that you will be blest not only with a happy home in this world, but what is a thousand-fold

more important, the aid of a truly religious wife, to lead a thoroughly humble, prayerful, and consistent Christian life."

"Thank 'e, sir. Thank 'e. With the grace of God, she will; and my first prayer to the Lord in Heaven will be just this—to let me live long enough for to see that young fool of a Bob the butcher ahangin' from his own steelyard, By reason of the idiot he hath made of his self, by marrying of that silly minx, Tamar Haddon!"

"The grace of God is boundless; and Tamar may improve. Try to make the best of her, Mr. Jakes. She will always look up to you, I am sure, feeling the strength of your character, and the example of higher principles."

"She!" replied the sergeant without a blush, but after a keen reconnoitring glance. "The likes of her doesn't get no benefit from example. But I must not keep you, sir, so long without your hat on."

"This is a day of many strange events," Mr. Penniloe began to meditate, as he leaned back in his long sermon-chair, with the shadows of the Spring night deepening. "Lady Waldron gone, to support her brother's case in Spain, because she had so wronged him. A thousand pounds suddenly forthcoming, to lift us out of our affliction; sweet Nicie left in the charge of Mrs. Webber, who comes to live at Walderscourt; Christie Fox allowed to have her own way, as she was pretty sure to do; and now Thyatira, Thyatira Muggridge, not content to lead a quiet, useful, respectable, Christian, and well-paid life, but launched into matrimony with a man of many stripes! I know not how the school will be conducted, or my own household, if it comes to that. Truly, when a clergyman is left without a wife——"

"I want to come in, and the door won't open"—a clear but impatient voice was heard—"I want to see you, before anybody else does." And then another shake was given.

"Why, Zip, my dear child! Zip, don't be so head-long. I thought you were learning self-command. Why, how have you come? What is the meaning of all this?"

"Well, now they may kill me, if they like. I told them I would hear your voice again, and then they might skin me, if it suited them. I won't have their religion. There is none of it inside them. You are the only one I ever saw, that God has made with his eyes open. I like them very well, but what are they to you? Why, they won't let me speak as I was made! It is no good sending me away again. Parson, you mustn't stand up like that. Can't you see that I want to kiss you?"

"My dear little child, with all my heart. But I never saw any one half so——"

"Half so what? I don't care what, so long as I have got you round the neck," cried the child as she covered his face with kisses, drawing back every now and then, to look into his calm blue eyes with flashes of adoration. "The Lord should have made me your child, instead of that well-conducted waxy thing—look at my nails! She had better not come now."

"Alas! Have you cultivated nothing but your nails? But why did the good ladies send you home so soon? They said they would keep you until Whitsuntide."

"I got a punishment on purpose, and I let the old girls go to dinner. Then I said the Lord's Prayer, and slipped down the back stairs."

"And you plodded more than twenty miles alone? Oh Zip, what a difficult thing it will be to guide you into the ways of peace!"

"They say I talks broad a bit still sometimes, and they gives me ever so much roilying. But I'd sit up all night with a cork in my mouth, if so be, I could plaize 'e, Parson."

"You must want something better than a cork, my dear"—vexed as he was, Mr. Penniloe admired the vigorous growth and high spirit of the child—"after twenty-two miles of our up and down roads. Now go to Mrs. Muggridge, but remember one thing—if you are unkind to my little Fay, how can you expect me to be kind to you?"

"Not a very lofty way for me to put it," he reflected, while Zip was being cared for in the kitchen; "but what am I to do with that strange child? If the girl is mother to the woman, she will be none of the choir Angelic, contented with duty, and hymns of repose. If 'nature maketh nadders,' as our good people say, Zippy* hath more of sting than sugar in her bowl."

But when the present moment thrives, and life is warm and active, and those in whom we take delight are prosperous and happy, what is there why we should not smile, and keep in tune with all around, and find the flavour of the world returning to our relish? This may not be of the noblest style of thinking, or of living; but he who would, in his little way, rather help than harm his fellows, soon finds out that it cannot be done by carping and girding at them. By intimacy with

* This proved too true, as may be shown hereafter.

their lower parts, and rank insistence on them, one may for himself obtain some power, yielded by a hateful shame. But who esteems him, who is better for his fetid labours, who would go to him for comfort when the world is waning, who—though in his home he may be loveable—can love him?

Mr. Penniloe was not one of those who mount mankind by lowering it. From year to year his influence grew, as grows a tree in the backwood age, that neither shuns nor defies the storm. Though certain persons opposed him still—as happens to every active man—there was not one of them that did not think all the others wrong in doing so. For instance Lady Waldron, when she returned with her son from Spain, thought Mrs. Fox by no means reasonable, and Mrs. Fox thought Lady Waldron anything but sensible, when either of them differed with the clergyman and the other. For verily it was a harder thing to settle all the important points concerning Nicie and Jemmy Fox, than to come to a perfect understanding in the case of Christie and Frank Gilham.

However the parish was pleased at last to hear that everything had been arranged; and a mighty day it was to be for all that pleasant neighbourhood, although no doubt a quiet, and as every one hoped, a sober one. On account of her father's sad condition, Christie as well as Nicie, was to make her vows in the grand old church, which was not wholly finished yet, because there was so much more to do, through the fine influx of money. Currency is so called perhaps, not only because it runs away so fast, but also because it runs together; the prefix being omitted through our warm affection and

longing for the terms of familiarity. At any rate the Parson and the stout Churchwardens of Perlycross had just received another hundred pounds when the following interview came to pass.

It was on the bank of the crystal Perle, at the place where the Priestwell brook glides in, and a single plank without a handrail crosses it into the meads below. Here are some stickles of good speed, and right complexion, for the fly to float quietly into a dainty mouth, and produce a fine fry in the evening; and here, if any man rejoice not in the gentle art, yet may he find sweet comfort and release of worldly trouble, by sitting softly on the bank, and letting all the birds sing to him, and all the flowers fill the air, and all the little waves go by, as his own anxieties have gone.

Sometimes Mr. Penniloe, whenever he could spare the time, allowed his heart to go up to heaven, where his soul was waiting for it and wondering at its little cares. And so on this fair morning of the May, here he sat upon a bank of Spring, gazing at the gliding water through the mute salaam of twigs.

"Reverend, I congratulate you. Never heard of a finer hit. A solid hundred out of Gowler! Never bet with a parson, eh? I thought he knew the world too well."

A few months back and the clergyman would have risen very stiffly, and kept his distance from this joke. But now he had a genuine liking for this "Godless Gronow," and knew that his mind was the worst part of him.

"Doctor, you know that it was no bet;" he said, as he shook hands heartily. "Nevertheless I feel some doubts about accepting——"

"You can't help it. The money is not for yourself, and you rob the Church, if you refuse it. The joke of it is that I saw through the mill-stone, where that conceited fellow failed. Come now, as you are a sporting man, I'll bet you a crown that I catch a trout in this little stickle above the plank."

"Done!" cried Mr. Penniloe, forgetting his position, but observing Gronow's as he whirled his flies.

The doctor threshed heartily, and at his very best; even bending his back as he had seen Pike do, and screwing up his lips, and keeping, in a strict line with his line, his body and his mind and whole existence.

Mr. Penniloe's face wore an amiable smile, as he watched the intensity of his friend. Crowns in his private purse were few and far between, and if he should attain one by the present venture, it would simply go into the poor-box; yet such was his sympathy with human nature that he hoped against hope to see a little trout pulled out. But the willows bowed sweetly, and the wind went by, and the water flowed on, with all its clever children safe.

"Here you are, Reverend!" said the philosophic Gronow, pulling out his cart-wheel like a man; "you can't make them take you when they don't choose, can you? But I'll make them pay out for it, when they begin to rise."

"The fact of it is that you are too skilful, doctor; and you let them see so much of you that they feel it in their hearts."

"There may be truth in that. But my own idea is, that I manage to instil into my flies too keen a sense of their own dependence upon me. Now what am I to

do? I must have a dish and a good dish too of trout, for this evening's supper. You know the honour and the pleasure I am to have of giving the last bachelor and maiden feast to the heroes and heroines of to-morrow, Nicie and Jemmy Fox, Christie and Frank Gilham. Their people are glad to be quit of them in the fuss, and they are too glad to be out of it. None of your imported stuff for me. Nothing is to be allowed upon the table, unless it is the produce of our own parish. A fine fore-quarter, and a ripe sirloin, my own asparagus, and lettuce, and sea-kail, and frame-potatoes in their jackets. Stewed pears and clotted cream, grapes, and a pine-apple (coming of course from Walderscourt) —oh Reverend, what a good man you would be, if you only knew what is good to eat!"

"But I do. And I shall know still better by and by. I understood that I was kindly invited."

"To be sure, and one of the most important. But I must look sharp, or I shall never get the fish. By the by, you couldn't take the rod for half an hour, could you? I hear that you have been a fine hand at it."

Mr. Penniloe stood with his hand upon a burr-knot of oak, and looked at the fishing-rod. If it had been a good, homely, hard-working, and plain-living bit of stuff, such as Saint Peter might have swung upon the banks of Jordan, haply the parson might have yielded to the sweet temptation. For here within a few clicks of reel was goodly choice of many waters, various as the weather —placid glides of middle currents rippling off towards either bank, petulant swerves from bank, or bole, with a plashing and a murmur and a gurgling from below, and then a spread of quiet dimples deepening to a

limpid pool. Taking all the twists and turns of river Perle and Priestwell brook, there must have been a mile of water in two flowery meadows, water bright with stickle runs, gloomy with still corners, or quivering with crafty hovers where a king of fish might dwell.

But lo, the king of fishermen, or at least the young prince was coming! The doctor caught the parson's sleeve, and his face assumed its worst expression, perhaps its usual one before he took to Church-going and fly-fishing.

"Just look! Over there, by that wild cherry-tree!" He whispered very fiercely. "I am sure it's that sneak of a Pike once more. Come into this bush, and watch him. I thought he was gone to Oxford. Why, I never saw him fishing once last week."

"Pike is no sneak, but a very honest fellow," his tutor answered warmly. "But I was obliged by a sad offence of his to stop him from handling the rod last week. He begged me to lay it on his back instead. The poor boy scarcely took a bit of food. He will never forget that punishment."

"Well he seems to be making up for it now. What luck he has, and I get none!"

Mr. Penniloe smiled as his favourite pupil crossed the Perle towards them. He was not wading—in such small waters there is no necessity for that—but stepping lightly from pile to pile and slab to slab, where the relics of an ancient weir stood above the flashing river. Whistling softly, and calmly watching every curl and ripple, he was throwing a long line up the stream, while his flies were flitting as if human genius had turned them in their posthumous condition into moths.

His rod showed not a glance of light, but from spike to top-ring quivered with the vigilance of death.

While the envious Gronow watched, with bated breath and teeth set hard, two or three merry little trout were taught what they were made for; then in a soft swirl near the bank that dimpled like a maiden's cheek, an excellent fish with a yellow belly bravely made room in it for something choice. Before he had smacked his lips thoroughly, behold another fly of wondrous beauty—laced with silver, azure-pinioned, and with an exquisite curl of tail—came fluttering through the golden world so marvellous to the race below. The poor fly shuddered at the giddy gulf, then folded his wings and fell helpless. "I have thee," exclaimed the trout,—but ah! more truly the same thing said the Pike. A gallant struggle, a thrilling minute, silvery dashes, and golden rolls, and there between Dr. Gronow's feet lay upon Dr. Gronow's land a visitor he would have given half the meadow to have placed there.

"Don't touch him," said Pike, in the calmest manner; "or you'll be sure to let him in again. He will turn the pound handsomely, don't you think?"

"A cool hand, truly, this pupil of yours!" quoth the doctor to the parson. "To consult me about the weight of my own fish, and then put him in his basket! Young man, this meadow belongs to me."

"Yes, sir, I dare say; but the fish don't live altogether in the meadow. And I never heard that you preserve the Perle. Priestwell brook you do, I know. But I don't want to go there, if I might."

"I dare say. Perhaps the grapes are sour. Never

mind; let us see how you have done. I find them taking rather short to-day. Why you don't mean to say you have caught all those!"

"I ought to have done better," said the modest Pike, "but I lost two very nice fish by being in too much of a hurry. That comes of being stopped from it all last week. But I see you have not been lucky yet. You are welcome to these, sir, if Mr. Penniloe does not want them. By strict right, I dare say they belong to you."

"Not one of them, Mr. Pike. But you are very generous. I hope to catch a basketful very shortly—still, it is just possible that this may not occur. I will take them provisionally, and with many thanks. Now, will you add to the obligation, by telling, if your tutor has no objection, why he put you under such an awful veto?"

"My boy, you are welcome to tell Dr. Gronow. It was only a bit of thoughtlessness, and your punishment has been severe."

"I shall never touch cobbler's wax again on Sunday. But I wanted to finish a May-fly entirely of my own pattern; and so after church I was touching up his wings, when in comes Mr. Penniloe with his London glasses on."

"And I am proud to assure you, Dr. Gronow, that the lad never tried to deceive me. I should have been deeply pained, if he had striven to conceal it."

"Well done! That speaks well for both of you. Pike, you are a straightforward fellow. You shall have a day on my brook once a week. Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Yes sir, unless it is too much to ask; and perhaps Mr. Penniloe would like to hear it too. Hopper and I have had many talks about it; and he says that I am superstitious. But his plan of things is to cut for his life over everything that he can see, without stopping once to look at it. And when he has jumped over it, he has no more idea what it was, than if he had run under it. He has no faith in anything that he does not see, and he never sees much of anything."

"Ha, Master Pike. You describe it well," said the doctor, looking at him with much interest. "Scepticism without enquiry. Reverend, that Hop-jumper is not the right stuff for a bishop."

"If you please, Dr. Gronow, we will not discuss that now," the parson replied with a glance at young Pike, which the doctor understood and heeded: "What is it, my boy, that you would ask of Dr. Gronow, after serious debate with Peckover?"

"Nothing sir, nothing. Only we would like to know, if it is not disagreeable to any one, how he could have managed from the very first to understand all about Sir Thomas Waldron, and to know that we were all making fools of ourselves. I say that he must have seen a dream, like Jacob, or have been cast into a vision, like so many other saints. But Hopper says no; if there was any inspiration, Dr. Gronow was more likely to have got it from the Devil."

"Come now, Pike, and Hopper too,—if he were here to fly my brook,—I call that very unfair of you. No, it was not you who said it; I can quite believe that. No fisherman reviles his brother. But you should have given him the spike, my friend. Reverend, is this

all the theology you teach? Well, there is one answer as to how I knew it, and a very short one—the little word, *brains*.”

Mr. Penniloe smiled a pleasant smile, and simply said, “Ah!” in his accustomed tone, which everybody liked for its sympathy and good faith. But Pike took up his rod, and waved his flies about, and answered very gravely—“It must be something more than that.”

“No sir,” said the doctor, looking down at him complacently, and giving a little tap to his grizzled forehead; “it was all done here, sir—just a trifling bit of brains.”

“But there never can have been such brains before,” replied Pike with an angler’s persistence. “Why everybody else was a thousand miles astray, and yet Dr. Gronow hit the mark at once!”

“It is a little humble knack he has, sir. Just a little gift of thinking,” the owner of all this wisdom spoke as if he were half-ashamed of it; “from his earliest days it has been so. Nothing whatever to be proud of, and sometimes even a trouble to him, when others require to be set right. But how can one help it, Master Pike? There is the power, and it must be used. Mr. Penniloe will tell you that.”

“All knowledge is from above,” replied the gentleman thus appealed to; “and beyond all question it is the duty of those who have this precious gift, to employ it for the good of others.”

“Young man; there is a moral lesson for you. When wiser people set you right, be thankful and be humble. That has been my practice always, though I have not found many occasions for it.”

Pike was evidently much impressed, and looked with reverence at both his elders. "Perhaps then," he said, with a little hesitation and the bright blush of ingenuous youth, "I ought to set Dr. Gronow right in a little mistake he is making."

"If such a thing be possible, of course you should," his tutor replied with a smile of surprise; while the doctor recovered his breath, made a bow, and said, "Sir, will you point out my error?"

"Here it is, sir," quoth Pike, with the certainty of truth overcoming his young diffidence, "this wire-apparatus in your brook—a very clever thing; what is the object of it?"

"My *Ichthyophylax*? A noble idea that has puzzled all the parish. A sort of a grill that only works one way. It keeps all my fish from going down to my neighbours, and yet allows theirs to come up to me; and when they come up, they can never get back. At the other end of my property, I have the same contrivance inverted, so that all the fish come down to me, but none of them can go up again. I saw the thing offered in a sporting paper, and paid a lot of money for it in London. Reverend, isn't it a grand invention? It intercepts them all, like a sluice-gate."

"Extremely ingenious, no doubt," replied the parson. "But is not it what a fair-minded person would consider rather selfish?"

"Not at all. They would like to have my fish, if they could; and so I anticipate them, and get theirs. Quite the rule of the Scriptures, Reverend."

"I think that I have read a text," said Master Pike, stroking his long chin, and not quite sure that

he quoted aright; "the snare which he laid for others, in the same are his own feet taken!"

"A very fine text," replied Dr. Gronow, with one of his most sarcastic smiles; "and the special favourite of the Lord must have realised it too often. But what has that to do with my *Ichthyophylax*?"

"Nothing, sir. Only that you have set it so that it works in the wrong direction. All the fish go out, but they can't come back. And if it is so at the upper end, no wonder that you catch nothing."

"Can I ever call any man a fool again?" cried the doctor, when thoroughly convinced.

"Perhaps that disability will be no loss;" Mr. Peniloe answered quietly.

THE END.

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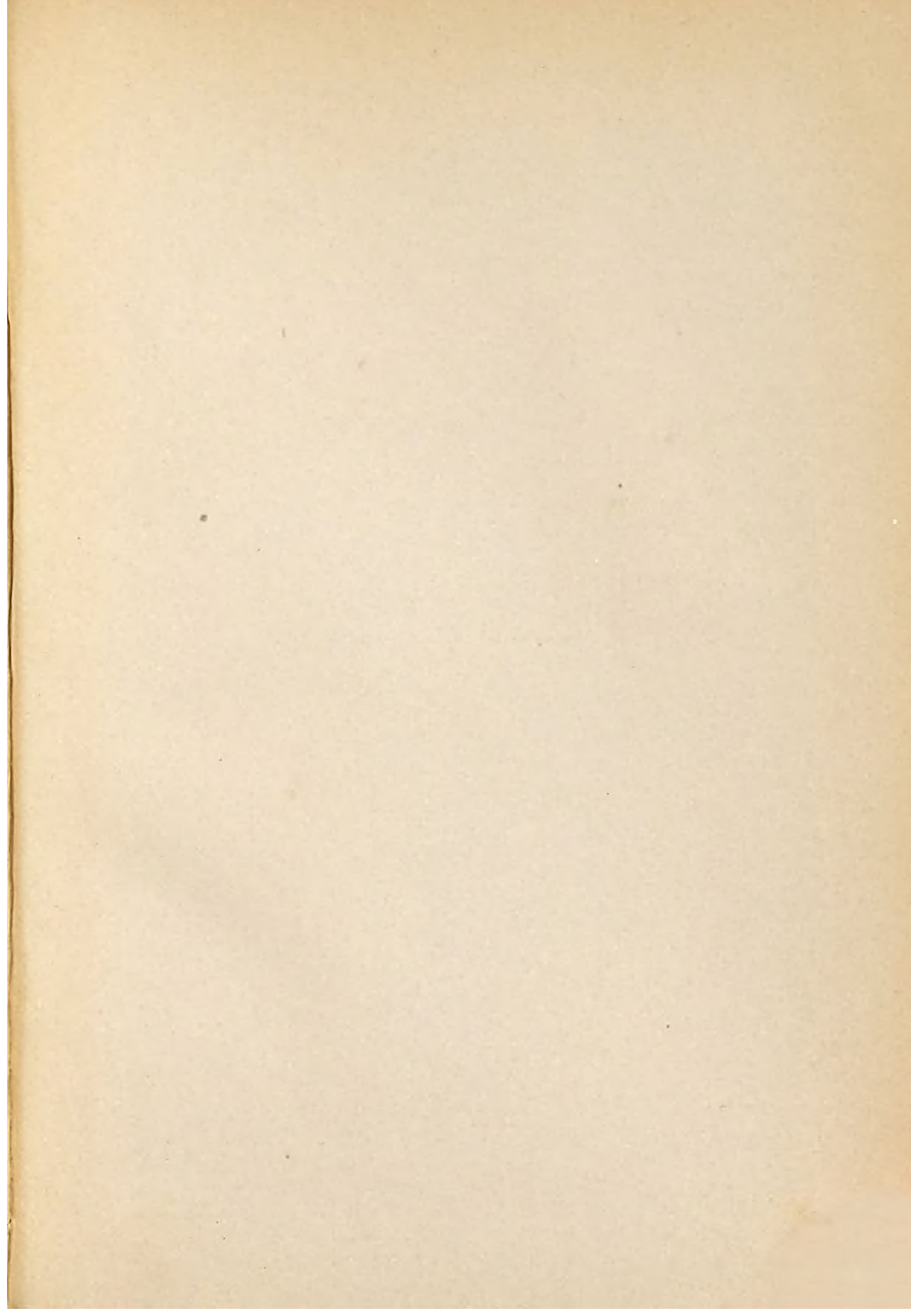
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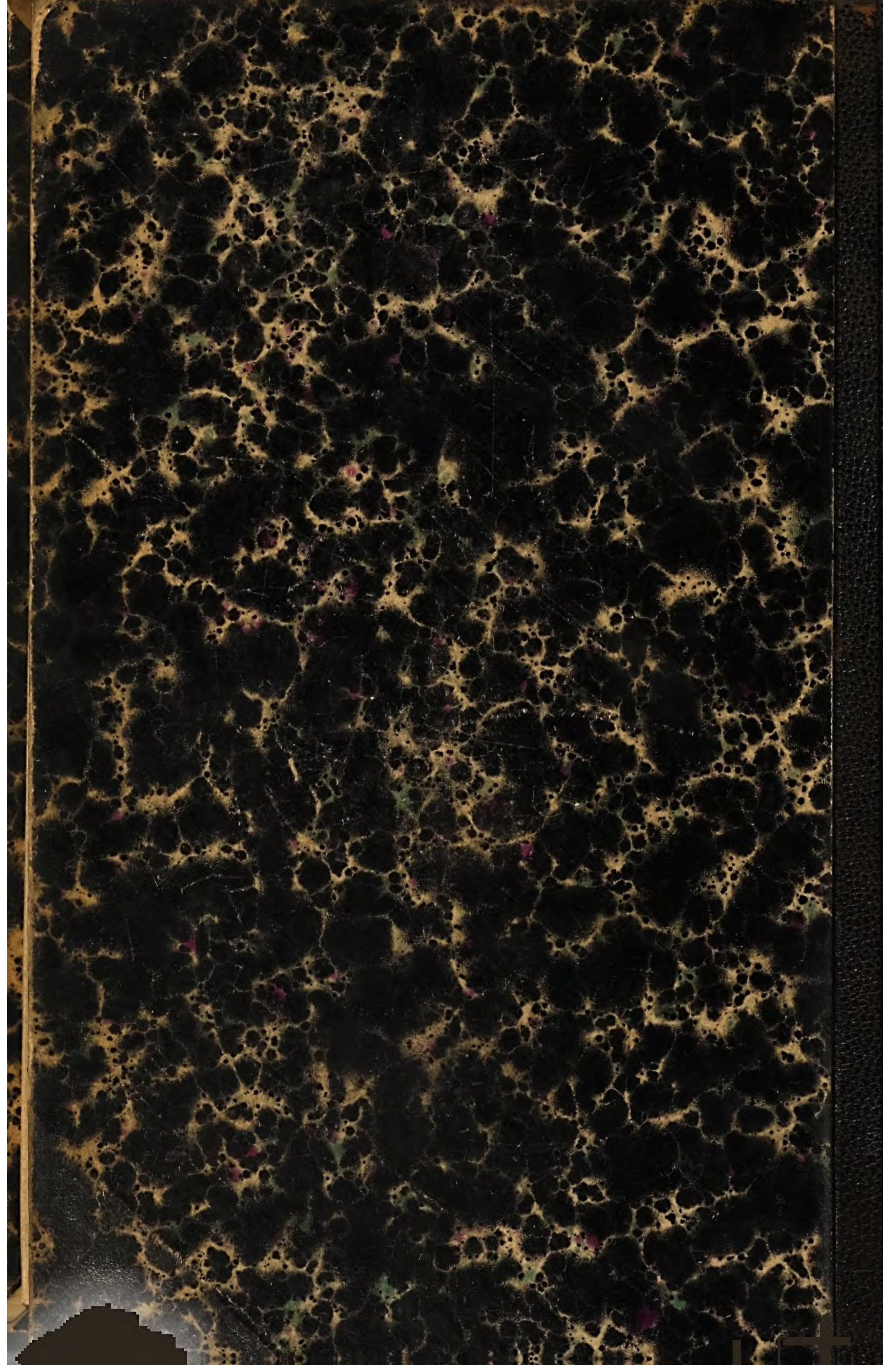
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